

FEBRUARY 1996



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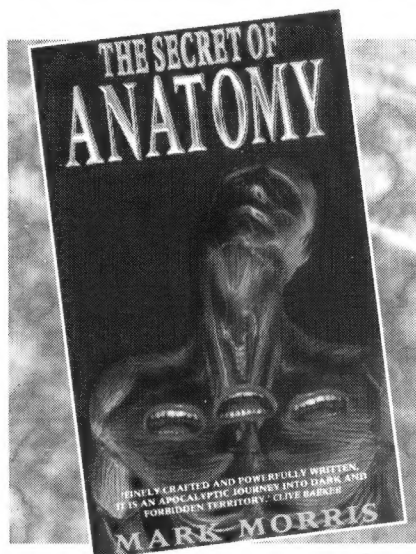
Brian Stableford

and others



**HUGO AWARD
WINNER**

New from Voyager



Message in a bottle

Published this month for the first time in paperback is Mark Morris's latest terrifying tale

The Secret of Anatomy (£5.99). A message in a bottle written over 40 years ago, leads David Fox into a search for the writer of the message. David's investigations bring him into contact with The Flux, a secret, supernatural society.

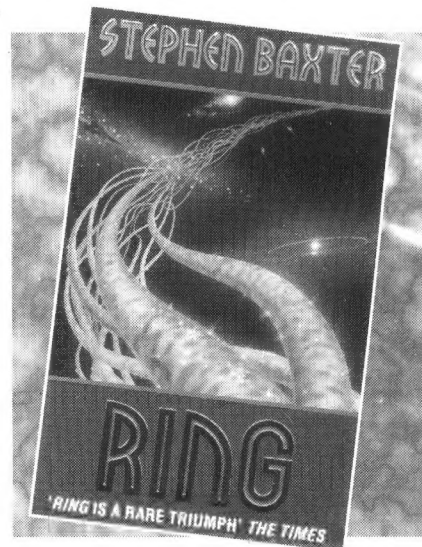
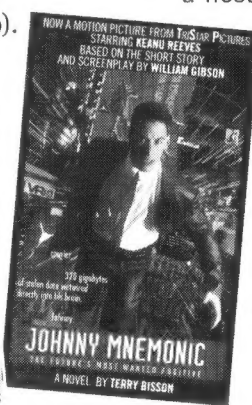
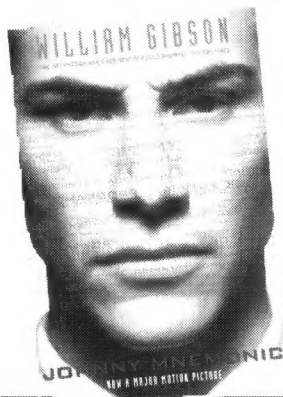
Mark Morris is the author of *Toady* and *Stitch* and is being talked about by those in the know as THE exciting new voice in horror fiction. A mild and pleasant man in person, he has a dark and twisted imagination which takes him and the reader into truly frightening territory. Perhaps we should leave it to the master of terror, Clive Barker, to tell you about

The Secret of Anatomy. He described it as 'Finely crafted and powerfully written... an apocalyptic journey into dark and forbidden territory.' What more can we say?

Action as fast as an amphetamine rush

Johnny Mnemonic, wetwired data courier, reckons he's seen it all. Until he's hired by the Vietnamese for a special job. Unfortunately, the data stored in his brain is stolen, and the owners want Johnny's head – attached or separate, which-ever's easier.

William Gibson's short story has now been turned into a major motion picture starring Keanu Reeves and Dolph Lundgrun. And to coincide with the film's release, *Voyager* are publishing two titles; a novelisation of the story by top author Terry Bisson (£4.99) and the original short story and script by William Gibson, together with a selection of colour stills from the movie in a collector's edition (£16.99).



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Stephen Baxter is the star of nineties British Science Fiction, recognised as 'A major new talent' by Arthur C. Clarke and praised by a host of critics. And now *Voyager*

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Baxter extrapolates the latest cosmological theories and skilfully combines them with convincing characters and an exciting and original plot to confirm his ranking with the masters of SF.

WIN

We're giving away 10 hardback copies of the limited edition **Johnny Mnemonic Story and Script** worth £16.99. An absolute must for Gibson fans, the book includes the short story, the original script (written by Gibson) and a selection of colour stills from the movie. This offer is just for Interzone readers, so act now. Simply fill out (or photocopy) the coupon on this page and send it to Paula Grainger, Voyager, HarperCollins Publishers, 77-85 Fulham Palace Road, Hammersmith, London W6 8JB. Closing date is 29 February 1996 and the winners will be picked at random.

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InterZone

February 1996

104

science fiction & fantasy

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Dear Editors:

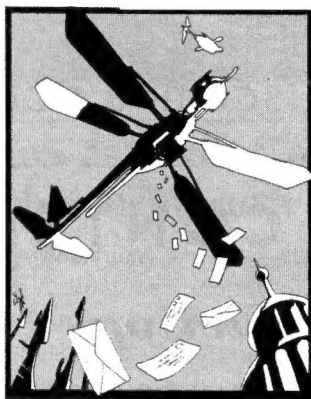
I was interested in your discussion of the French origins of science fiction ("Interaction," *IZ* 102). But there's a point buried in the same issue's "Books Received" which is also worth considering: you note that Michael Foot, in his biography of H. G. Wells, sees Wells as the heir of Jonathan Swift; in which case, is Swift a forerunner of sf? He surely is. Kingsley Amis made the point neatly: a modern Gulliver would travel to other planets.

Gulliver's Travels is generally discussed as political satire, or an allegory about human nature; but it is also a parody of the books of "travels" – some factual, some fraudulent – which were popular in the early 18th century. *Robinson Crusoe* belongs to this tradition. Heaping-up his "realistic" details, Defoe was trying a brilliant con: to its earliest readers, *Crusoe's* story would have appeared to be an authentic autobiography. The first thing Swift does is to parody this format (compare the openings of the two books).

Swift's "realism" then goes further. After all, where does Gulliver travel? He goes to parts of the world which at that time were unexplored: Lilliput, for example, lies "to the north-west of Van Diemen's Land"; Swift even provides maps. Throughout the book he is concerned with technical detail. The shipwreck, in the opening pages, provides the first example; Gulliver doesn't simply arrive in Lilliput by magic. But look what happens next: as the book goes on, Swift applies the same intensive technical detail to material which is increasingly bizarre. By the time we get to the flying island of Laputa, and the "scientific" explanation of how it works (Book III, Chapter 3), we are surely so close to sf as to be almost there. Swift is no idle fantasist. Throughout the book, we can see him asking just the sorts of questions an sf writer would ask: what would it really be like to be a giant in a land of tiny people? What would it be like to be normal-sized, when everyone else was 60 feet tall? Swift's genius as a storyteller is to ask fantastic questions: then to work out the answers in meticulous, matter-of-fact terms. This is what makes him a proto-sf writer.

Of course, there are counter-arguments. Swift was not interested in predicting the future; he had little time for science, as his hilarious satire on the Royal Society, the "Academy of Lagado," shows (Book III, Chapter 5); he did not explore technical possibilities for their own sake. His genius lay in metaphor; in finding fantastical equivalents for real-life situations. Hence Laputa, the flying island, is England; Balnibarbi, the wasteland which lies below,

Interaction



Interaction

is Ireland. When the inhabitants of Balnibarbi get out of line, the flying island descends and crushes them: again and again, Swift can come up with these memorably concrete visualizations, or literalizations, of abstract moral and political dilemmas. Perhaps his greatest invention in this line is not in *Gulliver's Travels* at all, but in the pamphlet *A Modest Proposal*. With its brilliantly worked-out scheme to raise the children of the poor as meat for the tables of the rich, the pamphlet is a coruscating masterwork of irony; it is also a brilliant fictional invention.

Swift is a great fantasist, one of the great creators of "worlds" in literature: everyone is fascinated by Lilliput and Brobdingnag. But in his concern with technical detail, with how things are done, he surely foreshadows hard sf, too. Most of all, he is a brilliant exponent of the fantastical as a vehicle for allegory and satire: how much sf has followed in his wake? I don't say that Swift was consciously working towards sf; I don't say that he was the founder of the genre; but is his claim any weaker than, say, Mary Shelley's?

As a footnote, it's worth adding that 18th-century literature is filled with anticipations of sf, and not just in the early gothic novels which were to culminate in *Frankenstein*. The 18th century, after all, is the period in

which the modern world begins to take shape. With its massive urban expansion, its industrial development, its revolutionary turmoil, the period is marked above all by the break-up of immemorial patterns of life. So it is precisely here that we see the first stirrings of sf: from the man-alone scenario of *Robinson Crusoe* to the imprisoning utopia of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*; from the urban squalor and impending doom of Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* to the devastation of Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. *The Dunciad*, Pope's vicious settling of scores, is a poem very much of its time, its satirical invective too remote for many modern readers; but look what happens when it's time for the apocalypse (Book IV, lines 9-16):

Now flamed the dog star's unpropitious ray,
Smote every brain, and withered every bay;
Sick was the sun, the owl forsook his bower,
The moon-struck prophet felt the madding hour:
Then rose the seed of chaos, and of night,
To blot out order, and extinguish light,
Of dull and venal a new world to mould,
And bring Saturnian days of lead and gold.

I defy any sf reader not to feel a familiar, authentic thrill!

David Rain

*School of English
Queen's University of Belfast*

Editor: So now we know – it was the Irish that invented sf! Swift's claim to be a forerunner of science fiction is certainly very strong. But this is a game of infinite regression: one of the authors Swift drew on for his inspiration (see the notes to the Penguin 1967 edition of *Gulliver*) was the mid-17th-century *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a Frenchman. A modern translation of the latter's amusing book *Other Worlds* was included in *New English Library's "Masters of SF" series* in the 1970s, and may still be picked up in second-hand bookshops if you're lucky. *Cyrano* in turn drew on *The Man in the Moone* (1638) by Francis Godwin, an Englishman. And how about this quote, from a preface to the 1648 French edition of Godwin's book, the edition that *Cyrano* read? "If, reader, you have ever seen either the *True History of Lucian*, or *Thomas More's Utopia*, or *Chancellor Bacon's New Atlantis*, I have no doubt that you will class with those books this new story, which is no less ingenious than diverting" (translated by Geoffrey Strachan, in his 1976 introduction to *Other Worlds* by *Cyrano de Bergerac*). Clearly, there was "genre consciousness," even in those days...

Dear Editors:

Congratulations on your long-overdue Hugo – I'm sorry I wasn't able to go to Intersection and applaud you in person.

Incidentally, I must admit to being rather sceptical about your claim in the latest *Interzone* (p. 5) that Pierre-Jules Hetzel turned down Jules Verne's *Paris au XXe siècle* for being "too imaginative, too farout," and "too futuristic." So far as I know, there are only two relevant pieces of evidence as to what Hetzel thought of this novel: a draft of his rejection letter – discovered before the manuscript of the novel itself, and reprinted in its entirety in Piero Gondolo della Riva, "Pierre-Jules Hetzel correspondant de Jules Verne" (*Un Editeur et son siècle*, ed. Christian Robin [Saint-Sebastien, 1988], pp. 11-19) – and Hetzel's pencilled remarks in the margin of the manuscript (some of which are quoted in Gondolo della Riva's preface to the published version); and neither the letter nor the manuscript marginalia seems to me to lend much support to your assertion. I suppose it is possible that the first and second paragraphs of Hetzel's letter (I enclose a corrected photocopy of Gondolo della Riva's transcription) are expressing, rather obliquely, a jaundiced attitude in general toward the ambitiously speculative predecessors of Verne you mention – that depends on whether we are entitled to take "vos devanciers dans des choses analogues" as alluding to these authors and "une tache impossible" and "l'infaisable" to the project of writing a novel in their tradition. But by the end of the second paragraph, Hetzel has bluntly stated that *Paris au XXe siècle* is not at all imaginative as a piece of futuristic extrapolation ("Il n'y a pas la une seule question d'avenir sérieux résolue, pas une critique qui ne ressemble a une charge déjà faite et refaite"); in the rest of the letter, Hetzel rings virtually every conceivable change on the opinion that the novel has little if any literary merit; and at the very end Hetzel says that he would have been happy to publish it even if it had been only "one-fourth successful" – all of which indicates, in the absence of extremely weighty argument to the contrary, that whatever the strength of Hetzel's prejudices against daringly speculative sf, these feelings did not play a significant role in his rejection of *Paris au XXe siècle*. Of course, even editors are sometimes unaware of their real reasons for disliking a work – or will sometimes stoop to concealing them. But I am reluctant to ascribe occult motives to Hetzel unless his publicly stated reasons are so bizarre that taking them at face value would cast grave doubts on his basic rationality. And, having read

Paris au XXe siècle, I think that nearly all of Hetzel's principal complaints are justified (I have briefly explained why in my review of the novel in *Foundation* 64, Summer 1995).

Tim Bartel
Oxford

Editor: *You're probably quite right, Tim: the major reason Verne's novel didn't appear when it was written is that it was a lousy book (it certainly seems so, judging from your detailed review in Foundation). But, as I said two issues ago, it's interesting to know that it was written when it was written and to speculate on Hetzel's motives for rejecting it – if any existed other than his lack of esteem for its literary merits.*

Dear Editors:

Might I belatedly add my thoughts to the question of the possible laws of growth and decay of literary genres, and whether they are exemplified in the fates of the western and science fiction?

I had been wondering myself about the fate of the western. I'd recently been reading about small-press magazines and could not find any devoted to this genre. Bookshops used to devote much shelf-space to westerns by the likes of such prolific authors as Louis L'Amour and J. T. Edson. Nowadays, there is no special western section (however, in Canada, earlier this year, I did find a very narrow bookcase devoted to westerns in a large bookshop, fully half of them by Louis L'Amour! And US-published paperback westerns can still be found in remainder shops). Meanwhile, the shelf-space for science fiction and related material has expanded enormously.

I began my reading life in earnest reading westerns, only discovering science fiction in my teens thanks largely to a school friend, Paul Ratcliffe. I have fond memories of picking up replica dime novels from a bin of jumbled paperbacks in Tesco's in the late 1960s and early 70s. These were reprints of the novels that began appearing in the late 19th century; they had garish covers and recounted the adventures of such heroes as Buffalo Bill, Jesse and Frank James, and Young Wild West ("written by An Old Scout"). The prose was dense and the stories frequently bizarre, mixed with elements of horror and fantasy. Unfortunately, I do not have any of them now. I think they were published by NAL or Signet. I read most of the "Dollar" westerns before I had seen any of the films that inspired them. One of my favourite early reads was *Gene Autry and the Thief River Outlaws*. Autry was a singing cowboy

hero of 1930s talkies.

The relative decline of westerns and the growth of science fiction must be due to either or both of the following: either the demand for them has dwindled, or they are no longer being published. It's a chicken-and-egg situation: readers may no longer "want" westerns because they cannot find new ones, and publishers may no longer publish westerns because too few people buy them. Alternatively, each situation may be the result of larger forces acting on both publishers and readers (publishers are readers too!). Gary Dalkin and Craig Turner suggested these in *IZ* 101.

However, to make the case for the existence of general laws of the growth and decay of literary genres would require looking at the fate of other genres and, indeed, forms. For instance, might it not be that eventually the novel and short-story forms themselves will die with the realization of the true potential of information technology in virtual reality? After all, these forms only emerged within the last two to three hundred years. (Aside: while there is much talk about media becoming interactive and the user not being constrained by the medium, might we not lament the fact that people are no longer able to attend to narratives written by someone else? Clear communication is a rare enough occurrence and demands the skill of active listening.)

To conclude what could turn into a tedious expatiation, here's a tentative thesis: part of the decline of the western may be explained by the expansion of the market for fiction literature in general in the years since the Second World War. Maybe there are many people like me who "graduated" from westerns to science fiction. In relative terms, there might be just as many people who would read westerns were they to be marketed as previously, but publishers have found that it is more profitable to publish science fiction, since this genre is read by a wider public, including potential readers of westerns. This thesis implies that there is something that westerns and some kinds of science fiction have in common; certainly, some of science fiction could be seen as the western translated into the future. And is there not also a certain stigma attached to reading westerns?

Personally, I have to say I favour the historical, generational explanation, as put forward by Gary Dalkin. Anyway, someone must already have done a PhD on all this!

Alexander Birchall
Liverpool



For the last ten miles she drove past refugees from the xenofarming. Some were in their own vehicles. Many rode town buses that had been commandeered to take the people south, or the grubby white trucks of the UNHCR. Most walked, pushing the things they had saved from the advancing Chaga on hand carts or barrows, or laden on the heads and backs of women and children. That has always been the way of it, the woman thought as she drove past the unbroken file of people. The world ends, the women and children must carry it, and the United Nations sends its soldiers to make sure they do not drop it. And the news corporations send their journalists to make sure that the world sees without being unduly disturbed. After all, they are only Africans. A continent is being devoured by some thing from the stars, and I am sent to write the obituary of a hotel.

"I don't do gossip," she had told T. P. Costello, SkyNet's Nairobi Station Chief when he told her of the international celebrities who were coming to the death-party of the famous Treehouse Hotel. "I didn't come to this country to cream myself over who's wearing which designer dress or who's having an affair with or getting from whom."

"I know, I know," T. P. Costello had said. "You came to Kenya to be a player in Earth's first contact with the alien. Everyone did. That's why I'm sending you. Who cares what Brad Pitt thinks about the Gas Cloud theory versus the Little Grey Men theory? Angles are what I want. You can get angles, Gaby. What can you get?"

"Angles, T. P.," she had replied, wearily, to her editor's now-familiar litany.

"That's correct. And you'll be up there with it, right on terminum. That's what you want, isn't it?"

That's correct, T. P., she thought. Three months in Kenya and all she had seen of the Chaga had been a distant line of colour, like surf on a far reef, under the clouded shadow of Kilimanjaro, advancing imperceptibly but inexorably across the Amboseli plain. The spectator's view. Up there, on the highlands around Kirinyaga where the latest biological package had come down, she would be within touching distance of it. The player's view.

There was a checkpoint up at Nanyuki. The South African soldiers in blue UN helmets at first did not know how to treat her, thinking that with her green



Illustrations by Russell Morgan

Ian McDonald

eyes and long mahogany hair she might be another movie star or television celebrity. When her papers identified her as Gaby McAslan, on-line multi-media journalist with SkyNet East Africa, they stopped being respectful. A woman they could flirt with, a journalist they could touch for bribes. Gaby endured their flirtations and gave their commanding officer three of the dwindling stock of duty-free Swatches she had bought expressly for the purpose of petty corruption. In return she was given a map of the approved route to the hotel. If she stayed on it she would be safe. The bush patrols had orders to shoot suspected looters or loiterers.

Beyond the checkpoint there were no more refugees. The only vehicles were carrying celebrities to the party at the end of the world, and the news corporations following them. The Kikuyu shambas on either side of the road had been long abandoned. Wild Africa was reclaiming them. For a while, then something else would reclaim them from wild Africa. Reverse terraforming, she thought. Instead of making an alien world into Earth, Earth is made into an alien world. In her open-top SkyNet 4x4, Gaby could sense the Chaga behind the screen of heavy high country timber, and

edgy presence of the alien, and electric tingle of anticipation. She had never been this close before.

When the first biological package came down on the summit of Kilimanjaro, she had known, in SkyNet Multimedia News's UK office among the towers of London's Docklands, that this fallen star had her name written on it. The stuff that had come out of it, that looked a little like rain forest and a little like drained coral reef but mostly like nothing anyone had ever seen before, that disassembled terrestrial vegetation into its component molecules and incorporated them into its own matrix at an unstoppable 50 metres every day, confirmed her holy business. The others that came down in the Bismarck archipelago, the Ruwenzori, in Ecuador and Papua New Guinea and the Maldives, these were only memos from the star gods. It's here, it's waiting for you. Hurry up now.

Now, the Nyandarua package, drawing its trail of plasma over Lake Victoria and the Rift Valley, would bring her at last face to face with life from the stars.

She came across a conga-line of massive tracked transporters, each the size of a large house, wedged into the narrow red-dirt road. Prefabricated accom-

modation cabins were piled up on top of the transporters. Branches bent and snapped as the behemoths ground past at walking pace. Gaby had heard that UNECTA, the United Nations agency that coordinated research into the Chagas, had dismantled its Ol Tukai base, one of four positioned around Kilimanjaro, all moving backwards in synchrony with the advance of the southern Chaga, and sent it north. UNECTA's pockets were not deep enough, it seemed, to buy a new mobile base, especially now the multinationals had cut their contributions in the absence of any exploitable technologies coming out of the Chaga.

UNCTA staff on the tops of the mobile towers waved as she drove carefully past in the red muddy verges. They can probably see the snows of Kirinyaga from that height, she thought. Between the white mountains. We run from the south, we run from the north but the expanding circles of vegetation are closing on us and we cannot escape. Why do we run? We will all have to face it in the end, when it takes everything we know and changes it beyond recognition. We have always imagined that because it comes down in the tropics it is confined here. Why should climate stop it? Nothing else has. Maybe it will only stop when it closes around the poles. Xenofarming complete.

The hotel was one of those buildings that are like animals in zoos, that by their stillness and colouration can hide from you even when you are right in front of them, and you only know they are there because of the sign on the cage. Two Kenyan soldiers far too young for the size of their weapons met her from the car park full of tour buses and news company 4x4s. They escorted her along a dirt path between skinny, grey-trunked trees. She could still not see the hotel. She commented on the small wooden shelters that stood every few metres along the path.

"In case of charging animals," the slightly older soldier said. "But this is better." He stroked his weapon as if it was a breast. "Thirty heavy-calibre rounds per second. That will stop more than any wooden shelter."

"Since the Chaga has come there are many more animals around," the younger soldier said. He had taken the laces out of his boots, in the comfortable, country way.

"Running away," Gaby said. "Like any sane thing should."

"No," the young, laceless soldier said. "Running into."

There was a black painted metal fire escape at the end of the track. As Gaby squinted at the incongruity, the hotel resolved out of the greenery before her. Many of the slim, silver tree trunks were wooden piles, the mass of leaves and creepers concealed the superstructure bulking over her.

The steward met her at the top of the stairs, checked her name against the guest list and showed her room, a tiny wooden cabin with a view of leaves. Gaby thought it must be like this on one of the UNECTA mobile bases; minimal, monastic. She did something to her face and went up to the party on the roof. It had been running for three days. It would only end when the hotel did. The party at the edge of

the end of the world. In one glance she saw 30 newsworthy faces and peeked into her bag to check the charge level on her disc recorder. She talked to it as she moved between the faces to the bar. The *Out of Africa* look was the thing among the newsworthy this year: riding-breeches, leather, with the necessary twist of 21st-century *knowing* with the addition of animal-skin prints.

Gaby ordered a piña colada from the Kenyan barman and wondered as he shook it what incentive the management had offered him – all the staff – to stay. Family relocation to other hotels, on the Coast, down in Zanzibar, she reckoned. And where do they go when they run out of hotels to relocate to? Interesting, but not the angle, she decided as the barman poured out the thick, semen proof of his ability.

"Bugger all here, T. P.," she said to the little black machine in her shirt pocket. Then cocktail party dynamics parted the people in front of her and there it was, one hundred feet away beyond the grey wooden railing, at the edge of the artificial water-hole they dredged with bulldozers in the off-season. One hundred feet. Fifteen seconds walk. Eighteen hours crawl. If you kept very still and concentrated you would be able to see it moving, as you could see the slow sweep of the minute-hand of your watch. This was the Chaga not on the geographical scale, devouring whole landscapes, but on the molecular.

Gaby walked through the gap in the bright and the beautiful. She walked past Brad Pitt. She walked past Antonio Banderas, with his new supermodel girlfriend. She walked past Julia Roberts so close she could see the wrinkles and sags that the editing computers digitally smoothed. They were only celebrities. They could not change the world, or suffer to have their world changed, even by alien intervention. Gaby rested her hands on the rail and looked over the Chaga.

"It's like being on the sun-deck of a great, archaic, ocean-liner, cruising close to the shore of an alien archipelago," she told the recorder. The contrast between the place she was and the place out there was as great as between land and sea, the border between the two as shifting and inexact. There was no line where earth became un-earth; rather a gradual infection of the highland forest with the coloured hexagons of alien ground-cover that pushed up fingers and feelers and strange blooms between the tree trunks into the disturbing pseudo-coral forms of the low Chaga. With distance the alien reef grew denser and the trees fewer; only the tallest and strongest withstood the attack of the molecular processors, lifted high like the masts of beached ships. A kilometre beyond the tide line a wall of red pillars rose sheer 300 metres from the rumbled land reefs before opening into a canopy of interlinked hexagonal leaf plates.

"The Great Wall," Gaby said, describing the scene before her to the disc. The Chaga beyond offered only glimpses of itself as it rose toward cloud-shrouded Kirinyaga: a gleam of the open white palm of a distant hand-tree, the sway of moss-covered balloons, the glitter of light from crystals. What kind of small craft might put forth from such a shore to meet this

ship of vanities? she wondered.

"Seven minutes. Thirteen centimetres. That's longer than most."

Until he spoke, Gaby had not noticed the white man standing beside her at the rail. She could not remember whether he had been there before her, or arrived later. He was small, balding, running to late-40s, early-50s belly. His skin was weathered brown, his teeth were not good and he spoke with a White African accent. He could not be Beautiful, nor even Press. He must be Staff. He was dressed in buffs and khakis and a vest of pockets, without the least necessary touch of 21st-century *knowing*. He looked like the last of the Great White Hunters.

He was.

He was called Prenderleith. He had impeccable manners.

"Pardon me interrupting your contemplation, but if people see me talking to someone they won't come and ask me about things I've killed."

"Isn't that your job?"

"Killing, or telling?"

"Whichever."

"Whichever, it doesn't include being patronized by movie stars, piss-artists and bloody journalists."

"I am a bloody journalist."

"But the first thing you did was come over to the rail and look at that bloody thing out there. For seven minutes."

"And that makes this journalist worth talking to."

"Yes," he said, simply.

And it makes you worth talking to, Gaby thought, because maybe you are my angle on this thing. The Last White Hunter. But you are as wary as the creatures you hunt, and if I tell you this it will scare you away, so I must be as stealthy as you. Gaby surreptitiously turned up the recording level on her little black machine. Enhancement software back at Tom M'boya Street would edit the chatter and fluff.

"So what do you think it is?" Gaby asked. Across the terrace a dissension between Brett Easton Ellis and Damien Hirst was escalating into an argument. Guests flocked in, anticipating a fist fight. Cameras whirled. Prenderleith rested his arms on the rail and looked out across the Chaga.

"I don't know about all this aliens-from-another-world stuff."

"Latest theory is that it wasn't built by little grey men, but originated in gas clouds in Rho Ophiuchi, 800 light-years away. They've found signatures of the same complex fullerenes that are present in the Chaga. An entire civilization, growing up in space. They estimate it's at least a hundred thousand years old."

"They'," Prenderleith said.

"UNECTA," Gaby said.

"They're probably right. They know more about this than I do, so if they say it's gas, then it's gas. Gas clouds, little grey men, I don't know about either of them; it's just not part of my world. See, they brought me up with just enough education to be able to manage, to do things well; not to think. Kenya wasn't the kind of country that needed thinking, we thought.



You did things, not thought. Riding, farming, hunting, driving, flying. Doing things. The country decided what you needed to think. None of us could see the changes happening under our feet: I was brought up obsolete, no bloody use in the new Kenya, that thought, at all. All I could do was find a job in something as obsolete and useless and myself. This bloody place has nothing to do with the real Kenya. Bloody theme park. Even the animals are fake; they bulldozed a water-hole so Americans would have elephants to photograph. Irony is: now the tourists are gone, there've never been so many bloody animals, all headed in. Counted 45 elephant in one day; no one gives a stuff any more. Tell me, how can it be alien if the animals are going in there? How could gas know how to build something like that? Feels to me like it's something very old, that animals knew once and have never forgotten, that's come out of Africa itself. Everything starts here, in East Africa; the land is very old, and has a long memory. And strong: maybe Africa has had enough of what people are doing to it – enough thinking – and has decided to claim itself back. That's why the animals aren't afraid. It's giving it back to them."

"But taking yours away," Gaby said.

"Not my Africa." Prenderleith glanced around at the famous and beautiful people. The fight had evaporated into sulks and looks. Leaf Phoenix was passing round cigarettes, to the thrilled horror of the other guests. Chimes filled the air. Heads turned. A waiter in an un-21st-century-knowing leopard-print jacket moved across the roof terrace, playing a set of hand-held chime bars.

"Dinner," Prenderleith announced.

The seating plan put Gaby at the far end of the long table, between a hack she knew from BBC on-line and a Bollywood film god who talked of working on 15 musicals simultaneously and little else. Prenderleith had been placed at the far end of the table, in the champion's seat, hemmed in by the famous. Gaby watched him telling his much-told tales of stalkings and killings. He would glance up from time to time and she would catch his eye, and it was like a little conspiracy. I should tell him that he is an angle, Gaby thought. I should admit about the recorder.

The famous claimed Prenderleith for the remainder of the evening, a small court surrounding his seat by the picture window with its floodlit view of the Chaga approaching molecule by molecule. Gaby sat at the bar and watched him telling his stories of that other Africa. There was a light in his eye. Gaby could not decide if it was nostalgia or anticipation of when it would all fall and come apart.

Out in the dark beyond the floodlights, trees fell, brought down by the Chaga, dissolver of illusions. The wooden piers of the hotel creaked and clicked. The celebrities glanced at each other, afraid.

The knock came at 1.27 according to the luminous hands of the bedside clock. Gaby had not long gone to sleep after dictating commentary. Noise from the upper decks; the party would gradually wind down

with the hour until the soldiers came with the morning to clear everyone out. One of the guests, high and hopeful? A second polite knock. The politeness told her.

She could see from the way Prenderleith stood in the corridor that he was a little drunk and that, had he not been, he would not have done this. He was carrying his gun, like an adored child.

"Something you should see," he said.

"Why me?" Gaby asked, pulling on clothes and boots.

"Because no one else could understand. Because of those seven minutes you stared at that bloody thing out there and nothing else existed. You know the truth: nothing does exist, apart from that. Make sure you bring whatever you've been recording on with you."

"You guessed."

"I noticed."

"Hunter's senses. Sorry, I should have told you, I suppose."

"No matter to me."

"You're the only one here has a story worth telling, who will actually lose something when this comes down."

"You think so?"

The light was poor in the wooden corridor. Gaby could not read his expression right. Prenderleith led her to a service staircase down to ground level. Stepping onto the dark surface between the piers, Gaby imagined setting first foot on an alien planet. Close to the truth there, she thought. Prenderleith unslung his rifle and led her out from under the hotel into the shadows along the edge of the floodlights. The night felt huge and close around Gaby, full of breathings and tiny movements. Her breath steamed, it was cold upon the shoulder lands of Kirinyaga. She inhaled the perfume of the Chaga. It was a smell you imagined you knew, because it evoked so many memories, as smell does more powerfully than any other sense. But you could not know it, and when you realized that, all the parts that reminded you of other things collapsed together and the spicy, musky, chemically scent of it was nothing you could remember for no one had ever known anything like this before. It pushed you forward, not back.

Prenderleith led her towards terminum. It was not very far. The Chaga grew taller and more complex as the floodlight waned. Looming, like the waking memory of a nightmare. Gaby could hear the groan and smash of trees falling in the darkness. Prenderleith stopped her half a metre from the edge. Half a metre, 15 minutes, Gaby thought. She curled her toes inside her boots, feeling infected. Prenderleith squatted on his heels, rested his weight on his gun, like a staff, hunting.

"Wind's right," he said.

Gaby squatted beside him. She switched on the recorder, listened to the silence and watched the Chaga approach her, out of the shadows. Terminum was a grid of small hexagons of a moss-like substance. The hexagons were of all colours; Gaby knew intuitively that no colour was ever next to itself. The corners of the foremost hexagons were sending dark lines creeping out into the undergrowth. Blades of grass, plants stems, fell before the molecule machines and were reduced to their components. Every few

centimetres the crawling lines would bifurcate; a few centimetres more they would divide again to build hexagons. Once enclosed, the terrestrial vegetation would wilt and melt and blister into pin-point stars of coloured pseudo-moss.

On a sudden urge, Gaby pressed her hand down on the black lines. It did not touch flesh. It had never touched flesh. Yet she flinched as she felt Chaga beneath her bare skin. Oh she of little faith. She felt the molecule by molecule advance as a subtle tickle, like the march of small, slow insects across the palm of her hand.

She started as Prenderleith touched her gently on the shoulder.

"It's here," he whispered.

She did not have the hunter's skill, so for long seconds she saw it only as a deeper darkness moving in the shadows. Then it emerged into the twilight between the still-standing trees and the tall fingers of pseudo-coral and Gaby gasped.

It was an elephant; an old bull with a broken tusk. Prenderleith rose to his feet. There was not ten metres between them. Elephant and human regarded each other. The elephant took a step forward, out of the shadows into the full light. As it raised its trunk to taste the air, Gaby saw a mass of red, veiny flesh clinging to its neck like a parasitic organ. Beneath the tusks it elongated into flexible limbs. Each terminated in something disturbingly like a human hand. Shocked, Gaby watched the red limbs move and the fingers open and shut. Then the elephant turned and with surprising silence retreated into the bush. The darkness of the Chaga closed behind it.

"Every night, same time," Prenderleith said after long silence. "For the past six days. Right to the edge, no further. Little closer every day."

"Why?"

"It looks at me, I look at it. We understand each other."

"That thing, around its neck; those arms..." Gaby could not keep the disgust from her voice.

"It changes things. Makes things more what they could be. Should be, maybe. Perhaps all elephants have ever needed have been hands, to become what they could be."

"Bootstrap evolution."

"If that's what you believe in."

"What do you believe in?"

"Remember how I answered when you told me the Chaga was taking my Africa away?"

"Not your Africa."

"Understand what I meant now?"

"The Africa it's taking away is the one you never understood, the one you weren't made for. The Africa it's giving is the one you never knew but was bred into your bones; the great untamed, unexplored, dark Africa, the Africa without nations and governments and borders and economies; the Africa of action, not thought, of being, not becoming, where a single man can lose himself and find himself at the same time; return to a more simple, physical, animal level of existence."

"You say it very prettily. Suppose it's your job."

Gaby understood another thing. Prenderleith had



asked her to speak for him because he had not been made able to say such things for himself, and wanted them said right for those who would read Gaby's story about him. He wanted a witness, a faithful recording angel. Understanding this, she knew a third thing about Prenderleith, which could never be spoken and preserved on disc.

"Let's go in again," Prenderleith said eventually. "Bloody freezing out here."

The soldiers came through the hotel at 6.30 in the morning, knocking every bedroom door, though all the guests had either been up and ready long before, or had not slept at all. In view of the fame of the guests, the soldiers were very polite. They assembled everyone in the main lounge. Like a slow sinking, Gaby thought. A Noh Abandon-ship. The reef has reached us at last. She looked out of the window. Under darkness the hexagon moss had crossed the artificial water-hole and was climbing the piles of the old hotel. The trees out of which the elephant had emerged in the night were festooned with orange spongy encrustations and webs of tubing.

The main lounge lurched. Glasses fell from the back bar and broke. People screamed a little. The male Hollywood stars tried to look brave, but this was no screenplay. This was the real end of the world. Prenderleith had gathered with the rest of the staff in the furthest corner from the door and was trying to sow calm. It is like the Titanic, Gaby thought. Crew last. She went to stand with them. Prenderleith gave her a puzzled frown.

"The punters have to know if the Captain goes down with his ship," she said, patting the little black recorder in the breast pocket of her bush shirt. Prenderleith opened his mouth to speak and the hotel heaved again, more heavily. Beams snapped. The picture window shattered and fell outward. Gaby grabbed the edge of the bar and talked fast and panicky at her recorder. Alarmed, the soldiers hurried the celebrities out of the lounge and along the narrow wooden corridors toward the main staircase. The lounge sagged, the floor tilted, tables and chairs slid toward the empty window.

"Go!" Prenderleith shouted.

They were already going. Jammed into the wooden corridor, she tried not to think of bottomless coffins as she tried to shout through the other shouting voices into the microphone. Behind her the lounge collapsed and fell. She fought her way through the press of bodies into the sunlight, touched the solidity of the staircase. Crawling. She snatched her fingers away. The creeping, branching lines of Chaga-stuff were moving down the stairs, through the paintwork.

"It's on the stairs," she whispered breathlessly into the mike. The wooden wall behind her was a mosaic of hexagons. She clutched the recorder on her breast. A single spore would be enough to dissolve it and her story. She plunged down the quivering stairs.

Heedless of dangerous animals, the soldiers hurried the guests toward the vehicles on the main road. The news people paused to shoot their final commentaries on the fall of the Treehouse.

"It's coming apart," she said as a section of roof tilted up like the stern of a sinking liner and slid through the bubbling superstructure to the ground. The front of the hotel was a smash of wood and the swelling, bulbous encrustations of Chaga-stuff. The snapped piles were fingers of yellow sponge and pseudo-coral. Gaby described it all. Soldiers formed a cordon between the spectators and the Chaga. Gaby found Prenderleith beside her.

"You'll need to know how the story ends," he said. "Keep this for me." He handed Gaby his rifle. She shook her head.

"I don't do good on guns."

He laid it at her.

"I know," she said.

"Then you'll help me."

"Do you hate this that much?"

"Yes," he said. There was a detonation of breaking wood and a gasp from soldiers and civilians alike. The hotel had snapped in the middle and folded up like two wings. They slowly collapsed into piles of voraciously feeding Chaga life.

He made the move while everyone's attention but Gaby's was distracted by the end of the old hotel. She had known he would do it. He ran fast for a tired old white hunter, running to fat.

"He's halfway there," she said to her recorder. "I admire his courage, going gladly into this new dark continent. Or is it the courage to make the choice that eventually the Chaga may make for all of us on this planet formerly known as Earth?"

She broke off. The soldier in front of her had seen Prenderleith. He lifted his Kalashnikov and took aim.

"Prenderleith!" Gaby yelled. He ran on. He seemed more intent on doing something with his shirt buttons. He was across the edge now, spores flying up from his feet as he crushed the hexagon moss.

"No!" Gaby shouted, but the soldier was under orders, and both he and the men who gave the orders feared the Chaga above all else. She saw the muscles tighten in his neck, the muzzle of the gun weave a little this way, a little that way. She looked for something to stop him. Prenderleith's rifle. No. That would get her shot too.

The little black disc recorder hit the soldier, hard, on the shoulder. She had thrown it, hard. The shot skyed. Birds went screeching up from their roosts. Otherwise, utter silence from soldiers and staff and celebrities. The soldier whirled on her, weapon raised. Gaby danced back, hands held high. The soldier snapped his teeth at her and brought the butt of the gun down on the disc recorder. While he smashed it to shards of plastic and circuitry, Gaby saw the figure of Prenderleith disappear into the pseudo-coral fungus of the alien landscape. He had lost his shirt.

The last vestiges of the tourist hotel – half a room balanced atop a pillar; the iron staircase, flowering sulphur-yellow buds, leading nowhere, a tangle of plumbing, wash-basins and toilets held out like begging bowls – tumbled and fell. Gaby watched mutely. She had nothing to say, and nothing to say it to. The Chaga advanced onward, 25 centimetres every minute.

The people dispersed. There was nothing more to see than the millimetric creep of another world.

The soldiers checked Gaby's press accreditations with five different sources before they would let her take the SkyNet car. They were pissed at her but they could not touch her. They smiled a lot, though, because they had smashed her story and she would be in trouble with her editor.

You're wrong, she thought as she drove away down the safe road in the long convoy of news-company vehicles and tour buses. Story is in the heart. Story is never broken. Story is never lost.

That night, as she dreamed among the doomed towers of Nairobi, the elephant came to her again. It stood on the border between worlds and raised its trunk and its alien hands and spoke to her. It told her that only fools feared the change that would make things what they could be, and should be; that change was the special gift of whatever had made the Chaga. She knew in her dream that the elephant was speaking with the voice of Prenderleith, but she could not see him, except as a silent shadow moving in the greater dark beyond humanity's floodlights: Adam again, hunting in the Africa of his heart.

Ian McDonald was born in Manchester in 1960 and has lived in Northern Ireland for most of his life. His most recent story here was "Frooks" (issue 100), and his latest novel is *Chaga* (Gollancz, 1995; known as *Evolution's Shore* in the USA). The above story is a revised "offcut" from that book— not an extract, but an episode which didn't make it into the novel.

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Giving & Taking

They never knocked, just came right in. Didn't kick down the door, nothing so thuggish as that. A universal code-card could pop the lock in an instant, and so save them from a suit for unlawful damage.

They could turn up at any time of night or day, but they preferred to come at night, when there was more chance of finding you in. Either way, it was best to be prepared. Aaron had taken to wearing pyjamas even when the darkness sweltered and he had to sleep with the air conditioning full on. There was nothing more humiliating than to wake up with a MagBeam blazing in your face and half a dozen men in trenchcoats staring down at your vulnerably naked body, then to fumble your way into a pair of undershorts and a T-shirt while the same men in trenchcoats looked on like bored scientists observing yet another run-through of a tried-and-tested experiment. It wasn't so much that they didn't know the meaning of modesty, it was the fact that they didn't care. So the pyjamas stayed on, even if Aaron felt he was in danger of sweating to death inside them.

Like so many people in his line of work, Aaron had developed something of an instinct about the raids. In the same way that you often wake up a few seconds before your alarm clock goes off, so Aaron would usually snap out of sleep just before the door-lock went. Perhaps he was responding to some subliminal cue – a stifled breath, a stealthy footfall – which his ears picked up while the rest of his body slumbered. Perhaps he just knew a raid was coming the way wild animals sense an impending thunderstorm.

Tonight, though, his instinct failed him. It wasn't until a Foreign Policy Police inspector was shaking him by the shoulder and aiming a hundred watts of

candlepower at his eyelids that he emerged from the Land of Nod, pawing at the air, curled and mewling like a ragged kitten.

More than the grabbing hands and the rough voices, Aaron was acutely conscious of the clamminess of his pyjama jacket as he awoke, and also of the need to urinate, a need that was going to become an urge very soon. It was this, more than anything, that concerned him as he rolled upright, swung his legs over the side of the bed, sat up, rested his elbows on his knees and his forehead in his hands, groaned, ground the heels of his palms in his eye-sockets, and finally looked up, squinting grittily into the miniature sun of the MagBeam. He didn't want to show a weakness, any weakness.

"Aaron Novak?"

"What do you think?"

"Aaron Novak of Apartment 117B, Lakeview Tower?"

Aaron shuttled his fingers through his hair. "Do you see a lake out of that window?"

"Answer the question."

"Yeah. Yeah, that's me."

"Stand up, please."

"I was just pointing out the fact that whoever thought to call this building Lakeview Tower either had a lousy sense of humour or X-ray vision," said Aaron, getting to his feet.

"Please keep your comments to yourself, Mr Novak."

"Sure. Just trying to break the ice, you know?"

The bedroom light came on. There were only four FPP inspectors tonight. Each was wearing the *de rigueur* trenchcoat. In deference to the weather, one had undone his shirt-collar button beneath the knot of his tie. As ever, Silas Gregory, the District Com-

mander, was leading the raid.

"Mr Novak," he said, with a formal nod.

"Commander Gregory," Aaron replied, with a respect that wasn't entirely feigned.

"You know the drill," Gregory held out a hardcopy warrant. "Read this and sign."

Aaron waved a hand. "Just get on with the search. I know what it says."

"You must sign it," said Gregory, thrusting the warrant under Aaron's nose. "It absolves us of any responsibility for breakage or loss incurred during the execution of our duty. Without your signature we leave ourselves open to a lawsuit."

"And if I refuse to sign?" As if he wasn't going to.

"Signatures can be coerced."

"Yeah," said Aaron, "painfully. And then, of course, I'll have signed a document that says that I can't have any comeback for something already done to me."

"Procedure must be observed," said Gregory. A dry smile bristled below his moustache. "Please, Mr Novak." He held out the warrant again. "For your own good?"

Aaron took the document and also the pen Gregory offered him, and signed.

"You won't find anything," he said, returning pen and warrant.

"That remains to be seen." Gregory produced an FPP-issue cyborganizer from his jacket pocket, keyed up a digital facsimile of Aaron's signature and compared it with the one on the warrant. "Close enough," he said. He turned to his three subordinates. "Off you go."

The FPP inspectors set about the task of ransacking the apartment with an enthusiasm that neither professional competence nor job-familiarity nor their habitual impassiveness could entirely disguise. They opened, they overturned, they scattered, they emptied, they peered behind, they looked under, they crawled over, they fingered, they flicked through, they unfolded, they shook out, they prised apart, they undid, they unscrewed, they held up to the light, they squinted at, they scanned, and all the time they grinned, to each other, to themselves, gleefully.

Meanwhile Commander Gregory stood by the uncurtained bedroom window with his hands clasped lightly together behind his back, gazing out through the huge sheet of glass at the night-time city. The lit windows of the buildings opposite shimmered in the billows of heat rising from the broiling streets. Rooftop parties thumped away around sapphire swimming-pools. A huge pleasure-dirigible glided across the sky; illuminated from within, it resembled a floating Chinese lantern. A dozen microlites buzzed in its wake, riding the bumpy currents of its slip-

stream. From beside the bed Aaron watched the Commander watching the city, and observed a humble silence while the pressure in his bladder slowly mounted in an exquisite crescendo.

"You're wrong, you know," said Gregory, without looking round.

"About what?"

"Whoever named this building didn't have a lousy sense of humour, or X-ray vision, for that matter. Whoever called this building Lakeview Tower understood that the difference between having a view of the lake and not having a view of the lake but living close to it is so small as to be insignificant."

"Meaning?"

"Simple psychology. You know in which direction the lake lies, don't you, Mr Novak, and sometimes, when the wind blows right, you can hear the engines of motor launches and jet-skis, am I right? And it can't be denied that the air in this area is just that much clearer, that much fresher, for the lake's proximity. And so even though you can't see the lake, even though it lies two or three buildings away, you are still constantly aware of it. The view is in your mind's eye, and the building's name reaffirms and refreshes that image."

"Yeah, well, if only that made a difference to the rent."

The remark won a smirk from Gregory. "What I'm getting at," he said, "is that something as simple as a name can have a powerful effect on the human psyche. If well-chosen, it can stick like a grain of sand in the mind, and around it can form a pearl of unconscious thought, a gorgeous, self-created mental mirage. Music can do that, too. Good music has the power to seed pearls of the imagination, wouldn't you agree?"

Aaron was about to answer when something shattered in the living room.

"Sorry!" one of the inspectors called out merrily, and the other two, in different rooms, snickered.

Aaron winced. It could have been one of his Foreign quartz statuettes, but he suspected, hoped, prayed it was only the sheet of crystal that topped the coffee table. There had been no hum beforehand, had there? And the FPP, for all their thoroughness, were notoriously careful about handling Foreign artefacts, since to damage one was to risk causing a Foreigner offence. Even so...

"I am sorry," said Gregory sincerely.

"Fuck that," said Aaron.

Gregory turned his grey eyes on Aaron, not in anger but in curiosity. Where had this spark of resentment come from? Of all the singers he regularly raided, Aaron Novak was among the most pas-

James Lovegrove

sive, the most subdued. Some harangued the FPP from the moment they arrived to the moment they left. Others sat sullenly in a corner talking to their lawyers on the phone, or followed the inspectors around with a video-camera scrupulously taping everything they did. Aaron simply accepted the intrusions and the inspectors' behaviour. Almost as if he expected to be caught with contraband and was resigned to the fact. Either that, or he thought that to act submissively was a good way of avoiding suspicion.

"Why do you do it?" Gregory asked. "Sing for Foreigners?" The enquiry was casual, as if Gregory was merely making conversation.

Aaron shrugged. The pressure in his groin was making him irritable, but he regretted having snapped at Gregory just now and wanted to regain the Commander's favour, so with an extra effort of will he kept his voice calm and level and friendly as he said: "Because I can. Because I'm good at it. Because it makes me a lot of money."

"There are many other more respectable trades a young man could turn his hand to."

"I don't think singing's unrespectable. It's no less respectable than the Council slapping a mandatory customs charge on Foreigners at the entry-ports the moment they arrive. Everyone in New Venice, whether they realize it or not, is making money off the Foreigners. Gondoliers, street vendors, tour-guides, garbage collectors, even..."

Gregory raised his eyebrows. "You were going to say?" "Nothing."

"You were going to say, 'Even FPP inspectors.'"

Aaron shuffled embarrassedly. "Yeah," he murmured. "Even FPP inspectors."

"Everybody else is doing it so why can't you? That's what you think, yes?"

"Yes." Defiantly. Aaron had nothing to be ashamed of.

Commander Silas Gregory of the Foreign Policy Police parted his hands, turned around, rested his backside against the windowsill and folded his arms across his chest – all with the deliberate slowness of a schoolteacher who has just discovered some hitherto untapped vein of ignorance in his class.

"I won't deny that New Venice has a lot to be thankful to the Foreigners for," he said. "Nor will I deny that almost every one of her citizens, in one way or another, benefits from their generosity. There are, however, different levels of complicity. My role as an inspector for the FPP, for instance, is to ensure that Foreigners are not mistreated, victimized, intimidated or conned in any way during their visits. That, I would have said, was a respectable and, more to the point, a respectful way of profiting from the Foreign input into the N.V. economy. Not only that but it serves a useful function as well. Whereas singing, it seems to me, preys on the Foreigners' most basic instincts."

"They enjoy it."

"Of course they do. And how handsomely they reward the men and women whose voices bring them such pleasure. Look at all this, Mr Novak." Gregory gestured around the bedroom, at its walnut fixtures, at the plush divan, at the mood-attuned wall fabric which was currently attempting to soothe Aaron's

emotional and physical discomfort with a deep midnight blue. "How many 24-year-olds live in this kind of splendour?"

"Twenty-five," Aaron said.

"I'm sorry?"

"I turned 25 last week."

"Congratulations. Your first quarter-century. I myself am approaching the end of my second."

"You look good on it."

"Thank you." Gregory seemed genuinely flattered. He spread out his arms. "And that's my point. Here I am, nearly twice your age, and I've not earned in my whole lifetime nearly a tenth as much as you have in yours."

"That must make you very unhappy."

"No." Gregory frowned, as though giving the facetious comment serious thought. "No, I don't resent you at all, Mr Novak, if that's what you're implying. I'm envious of your talent, perhaps, but I think that even if I was equipped with a magnificent singing voice, I wouldn't squander it on Foreign music."

"Have you ever heard me sing?"

Gregory shook his head.

"Then how do you know my voice is magnificent?"

"Isn't it?" said Gregory simply.

Aaron laughed, even though the action elicited a twinge of pain from his ballooning bladder. "Fair enough. And what would you sing, Commander Gregory, if you could sing as magnificently as you say I do?"

"Songs with words, for one thing. Words and tunes. Songs that have something to say, that mean something. Operatic arias. Beatles numbers. Old show tunes. Standards. Not this meandering, monotonous muck the Foreigners like. Songs that stir emotions in the heart." He slapped his chest. "The human heart."

"Well, I guess that's the difference between you and me," said Aaron. "You want to stir emotions, I want to earn a living."

"Yes," sighed Gregory. "I suppose that is the difference."

The urge to urinate had now become an imperative. Fearing that the only alternative was wetting himself, Aaron asked the Commander's permission to answer the call of nature. It was granted with a nod, and Aaron skipped to the bathroom, where one of the inspectors had just finished tossing the contents of the basin cabinet onto the floor and was now attempting to slash open the shower curtain with a razor blade.

"How on earth would I be able to hide anything inside that?" Aaron asked him.

The inspector shrugged and started cutting along the seam of the curtain's lower hem.

Doing his best to ignore the man's presence, Aaron flipped up the lavatory seat and relieved himself.

When he returned to the bedroom, he found Commander Gregory overseeing the two other inspectors as they dismantled the bed. While one methodically palpated the pillows, his colleague was on his hands and knees busily unscrewing the bolts that secured the headboard to the base. The walls, mistaking all this activity as the prelude to vigorous sexual congress, had gone peach-pink.

Gregory asked Aaron if he knew what they were

looking for.

"I do now," said Aaron. "A vocal enhancer."

"Quite right." Gregory narrowed his eyes. "Was that, I wonder, just a lucky guess?"

"What else could fit into the hem of a shower-curtain?"

"Ah yes, well deduced. Yesterday we arrested a technopirate who confessed to selling at least three dozen enhancers within the past month. He gave no names, just physical descriptions. One of those descriptions matched yours."

"And what if I said I don't use one because I don't need one?"

"Coming from a young man of such self-assurance, I'd have said that was highly likely. However, these days, with so many singers competing for the Foreigners' attention, each of you needs every advantage he or she can get. Even you, Mr Novak, might be tempted to use a vocal enhancer if you thought it would give you an edge over the competition. And since my job is to see to it that all Foreigners are treated fairly and equally..." The sentence languished into a take-it-or-leave-it shrug.

"Or see to it that no one person is allowed to earn more money from the Foreigners than anyone else," Aaron added.

"The Council," said Gregory, "welcomes Foreign tourism in New Venice and wants them to feel free to do as they please when they come here. They are our guests. But it also wants them to know that while they're here they'll be safe from exploitation. That's why there are regulations – regulations it is my duty to enforce – against gondoliers taking Foreign fares on unnecessarily circuitous routes, against tour-guides showing Foreigners around anything other than the officially designated sites, and against singers using any means other than their God-given talents to charm the golden giants."

"I never once met a Foreigner who complained because my voice was better than someone else's."

"That's not the point," said Gregory, stepping smartly sideways to avoid the mattress that one of the inspectors was heaving off the base of the divan. "The point is that we mustn't give them cause to take offence. If one of them feels he's been defrauded, for whatever reason, and however mild the alleged deceit, it could have a disastrous effect. We know so little about this race, they're such a mystery to us, and yet we rely on them to keep the economy ticking over – it's a precarious balance. Who knows, one of these days they might just up and leave us, on a whim, a caprice, and then where will we be?"

Aaron pretended that the thought had never once crossed his mind or caused him to lose sleep.

"So you see, Mr Novak, I'm not picking on you. I'm not picking on anybody. I'm just trying to keep everybody happy, humans and Foreigners alike."

"There's nothing here, Commander," said the inspector kneeling by the bed. He straightened up with a grunt and smoothed the wrinkles out of his trenchcoat. "Either he's got a very clever hiding-place, or he's as honest as the day is long."

Aaron struggled to keep the gloat of vindication out of his face.

"Very well then, Mr Novak," said Gregory. "I'm sorry to have troubled you. Again. This will be the fourth time this year, won't it?"

"And it's only July," said Aaron.

Following the four FPP inspectors into the living room, he glanced back over his shoulder at his wrecked bed. With the mattress half on, the pillows strewn, the sheets awry and the headboard detached, it looked like a discarded sandwich. He couldn't face having to rebuild it right now; he would sleep on the sofa for the rest of the night.

The living room looked as if it had suffered an earthquake. Pictures hung askew, pot-plants had been tipped over, artfully arranged piles of unread vintage books had been spilled, and a vase of dried flowers had been emptied out onto the lid of the Steinway baby grand on which Aaron accompanied himself when he rehearsed. He saw, to his relief, that it *had* been the sheet of crystal, after all, and not one of the statuettes that had been shattered. A snow-drift of fragments lay on the floor beneath the hollow frame of the coffee table, roughly enclosed by its legs. The crystal could be replaced, albeit at some expense. The statuettes had a value uniquely their own.

"I love those things," said Gregory. He had followed the direction of Aaron's gaze. "May I? I'll be extremely careful."

Warily Aaron gave his consent, and while the three inspectors looked on, neither impatiently nor with much interest, Gregory approached the statuettes, which were arrayed at assorted levels on the sideboard and on the shelves behind.

They ranged in size from thumb-high miniatures to three-foot-tall figurines as thick in diameter as a grown man's calf, and all were carved from the same opaque yellow quartz. The sculpting was rough, unfinished, primitive in its lack of finesse, yet at the same time artful and evocative. The statuettes represented Foreigners. As slender and elegant as African tribesmen, they stood in various ritual poses with their hands and their long, expressive fingers held up at waist-level to form word-symbols. These comprised the elementary vocabulary of the human/Foreign creole, the basic words that even a three-year-old child knew: PEACE, WELCOME, FREEDOM, MONEY, GOOD, BAD, HELLO, FAREWELL, and half a dozen other examples of convoluted digit-origami that could nowadays be found adorning everything from soft-drink cans to television station idents. Golden flecks glittered within the crystal like mica in paving-stones, and the statuettes' lips and placid, ethereal eyes were picked out in a clay-coloured pigment.

Gregory positioned himself in front of a medium-sized statuette and with an almost reverential care raised a finger to stroke its chest. Immediately a note filled the room – E-flat below middle-C. Pure and clear, the note rose in volume the more insistently Gregory stroked the statuette, and as he brought other fingers into play, so high and low harmonics appeared, like the blur around a vibrating violin string. You could almost imagine that the statuette had come to life and that the humming note was issuing from the oval double-bow of the lips on its

upturned face, and that the more pleasure Gregory's masturbatory caresses brought it, the harder it sang.

Gregory's expression was that of a child when shown the simplest of conjuring tricks, one part bewilderment to three parts wonder, and had Aaron been in a less distracted frame of mind he would have envied the FPP Commander his easy delight. Gregory, in his capacity as Council-sponsored killjoy, only ever met Foreigners under trying and exacting circumstances, answering their complaints and arbitrating over disputes between them and N.V. natives. Foreigners were never happy to see him, and even if he helped them they would only be grudging in their thanks, such was the fragility of their temperaments. Where Aaron won their gratitude and their gifts with his singing, Gregory only earned their resentment for his involvement – however well-intentioned, however courteous, however helpful – in situations that caused their sensitive souls trauma. No Foreigner would ever present Commander Gregory with a statuette, or any other gift, in grateful recognition of his services.

Finally Gregory took his hand from the statuette, and the note ended.

"One could play a whole symphony on a collection like this," he mused, eyeing the many different sizes of the statuettes. "How do they do it, I wonder? How do they make raw quartz sing like that? Will we ever know? Will we ever make musical instruments half as cunning and as graceful as these?"

"I wish we could," Aaron retorted. "Then they wouldn't cost so damn much to insure."

"Well, anyway." Gregory turned away from the statuettes quickly, as though their hold over him could only be broken by force. "We've two more appointments to keep tonight. Come on, men. My apologies for disturbing you, Mr Novak. Stay honest, and we'll stay out of your way."

Aaron nearly pointed out that honesty was never any guarantee of freedom from FPP interference, thought better of it, and instead said, "Commander Gregory?"

"Yes?"

"Would you like to take one of the statuettes home with you? I could pick you out one. As a gift. That one, perhaps." He indicated a hand-high example that could pipe out a piccolo F.

Gregory blinked, glanced at his subordinates (whose faces said, *What do we care?*), looked down at his toecaps, back to his subordinates (they still didn't care), and finally said to Aaron: "No. No, thank you, Mr Novak. I don't think that would be a good idea. Much as I would like..." He blinked again. "Much as I admire your collection, it would be inappropriate for me to accept anything from you that might be construed at a later date as a bribe. My contract expressly forbids such transactions. But a very generous offer nonetheless. A very generous offer."

After that, Gregory could not meet Aaron's gaze again, and as the FPP Commander hustled his three subordinates out of the apartment, Aaron allowed himself a small and not altogether agreeable chuckle. Conventional wisdom among singers was that you didn't mess with the FPP because, if they felt like it,

they could bring a whole load of unnecessary shit down on your head, but in the course of this encounter Aaron had proved to himself that a man like Gregory was neither to be feared nor despised. A man like Gregory, who lived a life circumscribed by rules, regulations and subservience to others, was only to be pitied.

That was the last time Gregory came to Aaron's apartment before the Foreigners stopped visiting.

The years after the Foreigners' disappearance were hard on everyone. While it was generally held that no human was to blame, suspicious glares were easy to come by and even easier to cast. A friend, a relative, a neighbour, even a stranger in the street might be the guilty one, the one who had scared the Foreigners away, the one who had abused their sweetly naïve generosity, the one whose carelessness had caused the golden giants to bolt like a herd of skittish deer, the one who had mortally offended one and therefore all of them.

Like all the other resort cities, New Venice fell prey to rage and despair. Fights and brawls became commonplace. Random, motiveless murders abounded. The fears and frustrations of a populace, 43 per cent of whom had relied solely on the Foreigners as a source of income and now found themselves without money or employment, fermented, seethed and ultimately boiled over.

As a direct result of the riots that left the Council headquarters scarred but unscathed, the Foreign Policy Police was disbanded and its component parts reconstituted to form the New Venice Protection Department, an even more autocratic and violent body whose powers were as wide-ranging as they were loosely defined. The inherent aggression of the FPP inspectors found full vent in the policies of the NVPD. Out went the trenchcoats and the home-searches and the forceful coercion. In came leather and street-patrols and batons.

They were years of terror and fire and fury. But beneath the tumult, behind the wide, angry eyes, there lay a deeper, stranger sadness – a sadness that was shared throughout the world. It was as though humankind had been handed a very wonderful gift and then, for no clear reason, had had it snatched away again.

The Foreigners had gone. Without explanation, without excuse, without warning: gone.

The city itself came to embody this sense of loss. New Venice's canals were left uncleared, her gleaming promenades and esplanades grew tarnished and litter-strewn, and her many tourist attractions were allowed to fall into disrepair and decay. Fewer and fewer gondoliers plied their trade along her weed-throttled waterways, and the dirigibles that rumbled overhead carried not sightseers now but refugees heading north to the cooler climates that had been less favoured by the Foreigners and so not as reliant on them to generate wealth.

As for Aaron, he weathered the lean times as well as anybody. Forced to give up his apartment in Lake-view Tower, he moved from one rented accommoda-

tion to the next, each less salubrious than the previous. Gradually he shed his worldly goods along the way, selling valuables and *objets d'art* to black-market dealers for a fraction of their worth. First to go was the Steinway. The statuettes were last on the list. He was obliged to part with all but a handful of them. Eventually he found himself, like so many of his fellow singers, reduced to surviving on handouts from the Council and seeking menial labour wherever he could find it.

The golden years were definitely over.

It was after taking up residence in the Basin, which had always been one of the shabbiest quarters of New Venice, an area characterized by the quantity of waste – household and human – that littered its streets and floated in its canals, that Aaron first started hearing rumours of an ex-FPP inspector who had relocated there too, and who was the object of universal scorn and spite: a grey-eyed, mustachioed sad-sack of a man who went from house to house offering his services as janitor in return for a meal and perhaps a small consideration of money if the homeowner felt that he had performed his duties well. The irony that a one-time ransacker of houses was now scraping a living through the restoration of domestic order and cleanliness was not lost on Aaron, and for this reason he initially dismissed the rumours as a vengeful urban morality tale.

At this point he was renting a one-room cold-water walk-up above a fishmonger's and working in one of the Basin's seedier drinking dens, earning meagre tips by singing old standards to bleary-eyed barflies who liked to slur gratingly along to the choruses, dogging the pure cadences of Aaron's voice with their hoarse, tuneless, nostalgia-choked drones. He thought he was handling the reduction in his circumstances reasonably well, but then as far as he was concerned his apparent submissiveness had always hidden a core of resilience. What others might see as compliance he saw as adaptability. And he felt that it was thanks to this quality that he had so successfully put the past behind him, abandoning it piece by piece with every possession he had parted with, all those belongings he had so unsentimentally sold. Once he had been wealthy, praised and prized. Now he led barside singalongs in a down-and-out dive in one of a depressed city's most depressed corners, and while this life wasn't exactly everything he could have wanted, he had just about stopped comparing it with his old life. He had just about forgotten his old life.

But when he heard locals again and again talk about someone whose description matched that of Commander Silas Gregory in every detail, Aaron felt compelled to seek the old fellow out. For one thing, he was curious to know why Gregory had resigned. For another, he wanted to know why Gregory was making no secret of his earlier FPP affiliation. Few people had pleasant memories of that self-important bureaucracy, fewer still had anything but criticism of the army of leather-garbed, baton-wielding bullyboys that the FPP had become. In Gregory's shoes, Aaron would have done almost anything to distance himself from

such past and present associations: emigration, reconstructive surgery, suicide, anything.

But he had another reason for finding Gregory, too.

Finally, after days of following false leads and winding up in dead-ends (one peripatetic janitor wasn't easy to locate in a city filled with a million such dispossessed wanderers), Aaron found himself on a sullenly hot afternoon standing at the foot of a tall, fire-scuffed dosshouse that teetered at the edge of what had once been a pleasant green lagoon. Now half-choked with the rubble of a demolished concert venue and a repository for excrement and shopping trolleys, the lagoon made a well-appointed lido for rats.

The dosshouse didn't have a caretaker as such, but a man watching television in the main hallway, sitting on a plastic chair and shelling and eating peanuts from a supermarket carrier-bag, had heard of a resident by the name of Gregory and suggested Aaron try the ninth floor.

There was no elevator.

On the ninth floor a profusely perspiring Aaron was told to try the eighth, but the eighth was a women's floor so he proceeded down to the seventh, and there was fortunate enough to encounter an emaciated octogenarian who was out in the corridor towelling himself down after a shower. The octogenarian knew a Silas Gregory, sure. Energetically rubbing the towel around his scrawny genitalia with one hand, he pointed down the corridor with the other.

"Room 23," he croaked, adding, "You're in luck. He's in," and also adding, "But he never receives visitors."

There was an electronically-controlled lock on the door to 23, but Aaron could tell at a glance that it hadn't worked in ages. The glass that covered its infra-red eye was cloudy like a cataract. The door looked flimsy, and he was tempted to try and kick it down, just so that Gregory would know what it was like to have your home invaded, but in the end he merely knocked.

There was no reply, but the stifled silence from within told Aaron all he needed to know.

"Mr Gregory? Silas Gregory? My name is Novak. Aaron Novak. Perhaps you remember me?"

Aaron thought he detected a shuffling footfall.

"You ought to remember me," he said. "You tried to bust me often enough."

The voice that emerged from behind the door was frail and tremulous, hardly recognizable as the same brisk voice that used to answer Aaron's irony-laden remarks with such blithe equanimity. "I know who you are," it said. "Why are you here? Have you come to get even? You wouldn't be the first, you know. Not by a long shot. Seems like I gave half of New Venice a reason to hold a grudge against me."

"I'm not here for anything like that. I just want to talk."

"Why should I believe you?"

"No reason. Except that had I really wanted to do you harm, I'd have broken in and done so by now."

"Yes," said Gregory. "Yes, you have a point. You were never that sort of a person, Mr Novak, were you? In fact, as I recall, you were usually quite agreeable. All right. Yes. I'll let you in."

Bolts were withdrawn manually, and the door shuddered inwards, Gregory dragging it hard against a moraine of damp-warped linoleum.

Aaron had expected the former Commander to have been reduced physically by his social abasement, but in fact in appearance Gregory was little changed. A little whiter of hair, certainly, but the moustache and the grey gaze were as proud and firm as Aaron remembered them. It was the first time Aaron had ever seen him without his trenchcoat on (it was hung neatly from a hook on one wall) but even without it, in only a vest and trousers, Gregory had just as much presence. The room itself was small, shoddily furnished, its safety-glass window-panes murky and cracked, and the walls and ceiling painted a shade of brown that was clearly designed to foster suicidal depression, but for all this the place was free of dust and tidy. A ceiling fan rotated with a sluggishness that belied the strenuous whine of its motor. If there was anything apart from the room and his voice to show that Gregory had suffered in the intervening years or that the reduction in his status had left a lasting mark on him, it was the scar that ran from one armpit over his clavicle to the centre of his ribcage, curving around on itself at the tip. The skin around it was puckered and at its fattest the scar was at least half an inch wide. It must have been a deep wound, and it must have hurt and it must have bled.

Once Aaron spotted the scar, he couldn't help but stare at it.

"Ah yes," said Gregory, rebolting the door and nodding as he moved back into the room. "You've noticed." He pulled out a chair for Aaron to sit on. "I'm not surprised. It's very noticeable. An ex-gondolier gave it to me with a meat hook. I suppose it served me right for citing him for overcharging." He uttered a short bark of a laugh. "I resigned the day after I was discharged from hospital. Used it as an excuse, really. It meant I lost my pension privileges and so on, but that didn't matter to me. I resigned because I didn't like what was happening with the Council. I didn't like the plans they had for the FPP."

He lowered himself onto the narrow iron-framed bed that occupied a good third of the available floor-space. Its stretched springs bellied beneath his backside.

"The attack taught me a valuable lesson, besides," he went on. "It taught me that there's no point trying to escape the past. Better to acknowledge it. Better to embrace it."

"Why?" Aaron asked. "Why cling on to the past if it only gets you into trouble?"

Gregory appeared to ignore the question. "I'd offer you some kind of refreshment," he said, "but as you can see, I lack the facilities." He gestured at the wooden table to Aaron's left, on which there was a kettle, a small television set and a half-finished packet of biscuits. The plug socket that could have powered the kettle or the TV had been wrenched out of the wall to leave a rough hole in the plaster inside which Aaron glimpsed rustling activity and the dim glint of light reflecting off dun-coloured carapaces. Seeing this, he decided he wouldn't accept a biscuit if Gregory offered.

"But in answer to your question," Gregory said, "sometimes it's not possible. After all, *you* don't seem to have let go of your past either, have you? Not entirely. You're here, are you not?"

"What's done is done. What either of us did while the Foreigners were here no longer matters. Agreed?"

Gregory understood the implication. "Very well. I can accept that for the purposes of this meeting there are to be no recriminations. Embrace the past but don't disturb the past, eh?"

"Sort of."

"That still doesn't completely explain why you tracked me down to this place. Unless it's to crow."

Aaron reached into his pocket, took something out and placed it on the table. The object hummed softly from the moment he took hold of it to the moment he let go of it.

"Recognize this?" he said.

Delight spread across Gregory's features. He reached towards the table, then drew his hand back. A frown clouded his face, not entirely extinguishing the delight. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's just that it's been so long since I've seen one of those, I didn't even think to ask your permission."

The statuette was about eight inches tall. Its hands were interlocked in an inverted steeple, thumbs outward, palms arched, little fingers interlocked. The symbol for "PEACE."

"Ah, but they're beautiful things," Gregory sighed. "Even just to look at."

"You don't want to hear it sing?"

"Well, I do, and I don't, and I don't more than I do. I'm scared it'll..." He shrugged.

"I tried to give you this once," said Aaron.

"This statuette?"

"This very one. You refused."

"Yes, I did. Yes, I did."

"You wanted it, but you said it wouldn't be appropriate."

"It wouldn't have been. Very improper. More than my job was worth."

"I have to say I felt bad about making the offer myself, afterwards."

"Well, who would want to give away such a thing? Even you, who had so many of them."

"This one in particular," said Aaron, and he seized the statuette and turned it upside down. Its note, suddenly kick-started into life, wailed up an octave as it was inverted, and then broke off when its head was pointing directly downwards.

"You shouldn't treat it like that," said Gregory.

Saying nothing, Aaron inserted his thumbnail into a notch in the underside of the corrugated base and after several attempts managed to lever open a panel the size of a postage stamp. The panel was so skillfully wrought that, when shut, it fitted undetectably into place.

Poking an index finger into the aperture thus exposed, Aaron drew out a coil of slender, rubber-insulated wire which was attached to a wafer of chip which in turn was connected to a microphone no larger than a match-head.

Gregory's grey eyes, which had grown wide at the

sight of the hatch, grew wider still at the sight of a vocal enhancer.

"Oh, my," he said. "And you even offered it to me. How brazen of you."

"I was pretty sure you'd never accept it," Aaron replied. "I was testing myself rather than you, seeing if I could pull it off, if I had the nerve to look you in the eye and tell you exactly where what you were looking for was hidden. I'd only just bought the enhancer, you see. That last time you raided me was the first time I actually had anything unlawful in my possession."

"Well." Gregory's mouth soured into a pout. "I hope you're pleased with yourself. You pulled the wool over my eyes, that's for sure." He delivered a slow, sarcastic handclap. "Well done. Bravo."

"No, I didn't come here to show you how clever I am. I came here, if anything, to – I don't know, to confess, I suppose."

Gregory's eyebrows went up a notch.

"I never used it, you see," Aaron said, toying with the wire that was the enhancer's sending antenna. "I bought it on an impulse, because so many of my friends who were singers were saying how great it made their voices sound, how it could drive Foreigners crazy with pleasure. I paid some technopirate way too much for it, and I still don't even know if it works."

"Didn't you even once wind it around inside your collar and try it out?"

"Not once."

"Why?"

"Because I thought I was a good enough singer without one? Because I thought it would be cheating? Because I was scared of being shopped to the FPP by a rival? I don't know. A little bit of everything, I guess. Too much pride, not enough nerve."

"And if I had accepted the statuette?"

"I'd have let you take it. It would have freed me from the moral dilemma. You'd never have found the panel. It was put in for me by the Foreigner who gave me the statuette. So you'd never have found the enhancer."

"And then the Foreigners solved your problem for you by wiping Earth from their travel brochures," said Gregory wryly.

"Exactly. I suppose you have a theory as to why they stopped coming."

"I don't, as a matter of fact. They first chose us on a whim, so maybe they changed their minds on a whim, too. Maybe another planet became popular, another dimension. Maybe we'll never know. Maybe it was enough that they rescued us from the mess we'd got ourselves into, and now we either learn the lessons they taught us or else we go under again for the final time. Sometimes I wonder if they weren't actually some sort of divine visitation."

Aaron had heard this sort of Revelationist-myth talk before. He didn't think it a very helpful way of dealing with the Foreigners' departure. Leaving the vocal enhancer on the table, he closed the panel and set the statuette the right way up. Immediately its note sang out around his fist, the vibrations tickling his fingers.

"Would you like it now?" he asked Gregory.

"Are you sure?"

"It's one of the last few I have left, but I'm busy severing my ties, one by one. Casting myself adrift. I'm thinking of moving to somewhere a bit cooler. One of the Canadian archipelagoes, possibly. I've just enough left from my savings to cover the journey, and there I can reinvent myself. There I won't be an ex-singer. I won't be an ex-anything."

"I'm told there are plenty of jobs going on the *les Quebecois*. I'd move there myself, if I could afford it."

"Sell the statuette and you could." Aaron rose to go. He held out a hand. "Thank you for your time, Mr Gregory. And no hard feelings?"

Gregory took his eyes off the statuette. He shook Aaron's hand. "None at all," he said.

Aaron had pulled back the last bolt and was preparing himself for a battle with the recalcitrant door when Gregory said, "Mr Novak? I know this is going to sound terribly presumptuous, seeing as you've given me the statuette and everything, but I was wondering if you could do me another favour."

"I can try."

"It's more of a request, really." Gregory blinked back his nervousness. "I know I don't have a right to ask this, but would you sing for me? Just one song. Just so that I can hear you for myself, see if you're as good as I suspect you are. I wouldn't ask this normally, but" – the grey eyes were shimmering behind a film of tears – "it's been a while since I've actually thought about the way things used to be with anything like pleasure."

"I thought you said you'd embraced the past."

"Embraced it like a drowning man embraces a lifebelt. Please. It would mean a lot to me."

Aaron couldn't see the harm. "OK, what do you want? I've perfected a nice line in rousing, sentimental show-tunes recently."

"No, not that. Not a song. Sing to me the way you used to sing to Foreigners."

"Well, I'm a little rusty, but..." He gave a Las Vegas grin. "I'll give it a go."

Aaron took a few deep breaths to flex his diaphragm, then drew the high F out of the statuette with a fingertip. Taking this as his keynote, he began to improvise a series of arpeggios in his sweetest alto, his voice going over the runs like a child making its way carefully over stepping stones. Then he settled into a soft trill that spoke of ancient cathedrals and guttering ranks of devotional candles and a nightingale swooping through the hollows of a vast, vaulted ceiling, something solitary in an emptiness, something sacred yet mundane. From this he developed a theme of glissandos that flowed in silky ripples of increasing depth and frequency – a vocal feat that had quickened many a Foreigner to a swaying, shuddering climax, playing as it did on their susceptibility to sine-wave patterns. Now he pictured in his mind's eye a field of corn and imagined his voice a breeze brushing across the golden swathe, gusting out in several directions at once to expose the undersides of the stalks in glossy swirls and curlicues. He sang inarticulate word-forms that sounded sometimes human and sometimes For-

eign but never quite one or the other. Easily, though he hadn't sung like this for three years, he found himself slipping into that calm, hollowed-out state of mind where he was no longer the originator of his song but its vehicle, to be driven wherever the whim of the music took him. Time ellipsed, elapsed, as images of seas and seasons and valleys and ancient green forests crowded through his brain and took flight on wings of vocal-cord-construed breath, emerging from the very heart of him, transmuted from thought to sound by an alchemical process he himself did not quite understand.

One by one these mental impressions flowed out of him and into Gregory, who saw them as if by telepathy, as if he were a television set and Aaron's voice the signal. A cloud of pink flamingoes taking flight from salty marshes. A queen bee humming at the heart of a contented hive. A necklace of lights tracing the line of a coastal road through the thickening dusk. A sun-drenched park playing host to a summer-full of children. Messages zinging through the wires of a 19th-century prairie telegraph. Two lovers moving against one another in the heavy lumbering flush of post-coition. Deep underground the bones of long-dead animals being cooled by a subterranean spring. A foundry from a bygone age gouting cinder-flecked smoke into the industrial night. A pack of wolves trotting down from the tree-line to investigate the embers of a camp fire. In the tiniest fluctuations of his vibrato, with each variation and modulation he introduced into his voice, Aaron drove these mental pictures like spikes of mercury into Gregory's mind. It was a song and yet not a song. It followed all the rigid laws and

rules of musical composition but respected none of them, bending them all to new and different ends. It was unearthly and rich and strange, and when it was over Aaron felt drained and satisfied. He had been worried that disuse would have dulled his talent, but it gleamed as brightly as ever. He was pleased.

Gregory was sitting gripping the edge of the bed, the tears spilling freely down his cheeks, his body motionless.

"I never thought..." he breathed. "I never knew..."

All of a sudden the room was cramped and stiflingly muggy, and outside, in the streets of New Venice, men and women of a world that had once thought itself damned, then thought itself saved, and now wasn't sure what it was, men and women who had enjoyed times of plenty and doubted they would ever see them again, went about their business with a secret ache in their hearts which was dulled by the din of day but which throbbed into life at night.

They came at night, usually, the fears. Kicked down the doors of the soul and rushed in to find what guilt had hidden there.

Usually at night.

James Lovegrove was born in 1965. His first novel, *The Hope* (Macmillan, 1990), has just been published in the United States. He is at work on his second, *Days*, and the above story is intended to form part of what he hopes will be his third, *The Foreigners*. Meanwhile, another novel, *Escardy Gap*, a sprawling fantasy set in an American small town in the 1950s, co-written with Peter Crowther, is due out in 1996. James is currently resident in Illinois, where he intends to stay for as long as his temporary visa lets him, if not a little longer.

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Application Deadline: March 8, 1996

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Clarion 1996
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The copyediting of books is an ever-reliable source of controversy. Simon R. Green sent a familiar cry of despair regarding his prose monument *Deathstalker Rebellion*: "The 'person' in question had no sense of humour, and had therefore gone through my entire MS crossing out anything humorous. Sometimes up to half a page at a time disappeared. I had to go through the whole 700 pages writing STET over and over and over again... Let us remember, this is the same publisher that puts out the Terry Pratchett novels. Perhaps he doesn't want any competition..."

Intrigued, I attempted to contact the anonymous (by professional protocol) freelance copy-editor who had worked on the book for Gollancz. Back through channels came this response:

"Only the stupidest of Simon R. Green's 'jokes' were deleted, as were hilarious cracks about the severely disabled. Where the author made the same 'joke' more than once, having clearly forgotten making it before (i.e., we're not talking about running gags), one or more renditions were cut. 'Jokes' in the following categories were allowed to stand: (a) unfunny; (b) very unfunny; (c) profoundly unfunny; (d) unfunnier than that."

Who can say where the truth lies?

SUCH INTERESTING NEIGHBOURS

Brian Aldiss wants everyone to know that he's appearing in Keynsham "as an appendage to the Bath Festival" on 27 Feb, 7:30pm, talking about Turkmenistan and pushing his travel-writer credentials. "By then, my translation of 'Songs from Central Asia' will be published. *I shall of course be singing some of them.*" The ominous italics are his.

Gregory Benford brags about his 1995 Lord Award, given for achievement in the sciences – both astrophysical research ("the standard model of the electrodynamical galactic centre") and for popularizing science. "If sf does that..." he mused. The other two recipients of these awards, comprising a statue and \$2,500, were Nobel laureates.

Jonathan Carroll's paperback collection was charmingly announced in *The Bookseller* as *The Picnic Hand*.

Jack Finney died in California on 14 November 1995 (a terrible year for sf), aged 84. The fame of his uneasy 1955 novel *The Body Snatchers* – or rather of its three movie versions beginning with the classic 1956 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* – sometimes overshadowed his other writing. *Time and Again* (1970) is surely Finney's best sf novel, and he also wrote many classy short stories: some early favourites were collected in *The Clock of Time* (1957).

Bob Shaw, illustrating anew the perils of these sf conventions, became engaged to Nancy Tucker during the annual Birmingham event. Congratulations...

Neal Stephenson was not best pleased when *The Economist* quoted "a recent sf novel" (i.e. his *Snow Crash*) as saying that America will soon lead the world only in software, movies and pizza delivery – but without attribution. "I found two footnotes – but for other people's books. Both, I note, are serious-sounding non-fiction works whose authors (unlike science-fiction novelists, alas) are evidently thought to deserve recognition for their work. *The Economist* should feel free to quote my ideas with due attribution, or leave them to languish in the obscurity of mere genre fiction – but not to enjoy the convenience of having it both ways." Well said.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

World Fantasy Awards presented at the 1995 World Fantasy Convention ... Novel: James Morrow, *Towing Jehovah*. Novella: Elizabeth Hand, "Last Summer at Mars Hills." Short story: Stephen King, "The Man in the Black Suit." Anthology: Ellen Datlow (ed), *Little Deaths*. Collection: Bradley Denton, *The Calvin Coolidge Home For Dead Comedians and A Conflagration Artist*. Artist: Jacek Yerka. Special Awards: (professional) Ellen Datlow for editing; (fan) Bryan Cholfin for Broken Mirrors Press.

The Financial Times offered a cartoon feature showing the financial past, with a highwayman stockbroker threatening Victorian investors, and the future – symbolized by the Mekon threatening investors wearing propeller beanies. The imagery of sf having swept the world, the Protocols of the Elders of Fandom are following....

Publishers & Sinners. How Publishing Works: years ago, one of our spies – who are everywhere – saw the original MS of David Gemmell's first Alexander the Great novel. Good stuff, thought Spy X; a well-told historical novel in the Mary Renault tradition, which should be marketed as such since its fantasy content was minimal. Hearing this praise, famous (then) Legend editor Deborah Beale made a horrible face and instantly mailed the MS back to the author, demanding a rewrite to insert lots more fantasy. The resulting book (reckons Spy X) was much inferior to what Gemmell had originally written. But the purity of the fantasy genre had been preserved.

British Fantasy Awards presented in late 1995... Novel: Michael Marshall Smith, *Only Forward*. Short story: Paul McAuley, "The Temptation of Dr Stein." Small press: *Necrofile*. Collection or anthology: Joel Lane, *The Earth Wire*.

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

Delany's Children is a "British sf group for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and their friends": £12/year. SAE for information to BM Delanys, London, WC1N 3XX.

1946 Retro-Hugos for work published in 1945 will be voted on and awarded by the 1996 Worldcon in Los Angeles (the "real" Hugos began in 1953 and have been annual since 1955). Arguably the winners will at least have stood the test of time...

Avram Davidson Award... this, established by the late great man's estate, has a certain ironic appropriateness in being for "the best-beloved out-of-print works of imaginative fiction." In particular, Avram Davidson's works are eligible.

Light's List of small-press magazines gives addresses and bare-minimum descriptions for some 600 titles: e.g. "Interzone SF Short Stories, Reviews" – "We're not small press!" I imagine our editor wailing. £1 plus A5 SAE from John Light, 29 Longfield Road, Tring, Herts, HP23 4DG.

Psychic Corner. This column is not afraid to record the following awesome 1968 predictions of the future! Fidel Castro assassinated by unnamed woman, 9 Aug 1970; discovery of antimagnetic forces makes rocketless space flight possible, late 70s; New York City inundated and moved further inland, 21 Jan 1980; Caucasian woman becomes leader of entire Far East, 1985; Atlantis rises and joins Africa to S. America, mid-80s; giant meteor destroys London but subsequently becomes profitable tourist attraction, 18 Oct 1988; Denver, Colorado, transformed to jelly-like mass by "strange and terrible pressure from outer space," 9 Jun 1989; Las Vegas hosts first Interplanetary Convention, 10 Mar 1990; global utopia almost achieved, 1 Jun 1995; world ends as mysterious space force sucks all oxygen from atmosphere, 18 Aug 1999. All from *Criswell Predicts: Your Future from Now to the Year 2000!* (1968) – it must be good, he was in *Plan 9 from Outer Space*...

“Where do you get your ideas from?” Ask this question at an authors’ panel discussion or public reading, and you will probably find out that Writer A doesn’t know (or won’t tell), Writer B relies on dreams and eavesdropping on the conversation at the next table, while Writer C is a devoted reader of the *Scientific American*. What none of these writers will admit to is that many if not most of their ideas come, in some shape or form, from other writers of fiction. We read and absorb what somebody else has done, and (consciously or unconsciously) we set out to do it differently. The French post-structuralists would say that all that any of us can do is to rearrange the texts and discourses that already surround us; and Robert A. Heinlein once said that there are only three basic varieties of fictional plot.

When Henry Fielding began to write novels, he started with a blatant parody of his great adversary Samuel Richardson. He took some of Richardson’s characters, added others, and did his best to damage Richardson’s sales by making them all look ridiculous. Few writers would even attempt to do this nowadays, and none, I think, would do it openly. In a culture where writing is valued, above all, as individual self-expression it is damaging to have to confess to imitating others. More importantly, for anyone tempted to write an unauthorized spinoff from another person’s work there is the growing danger that it will bring down the lawyers.

Our society’s ideas of originality and artistic genius emerged at much the same time as the modern system of copyright and intellectual property. Every text that comes under the copyright law has an “author,” including films, records, illustrations and works of visual art. The author as defined by copyright is ideally an “only begetter” whose works are the products of spontaneous generation or parthenogenesis. Copyright ensures that these works remain the property of the author for a fixed number of years.

Though there are time-limits to all forms of intellectual property, pressure from the property-owners has recently led to those limits being extended (in the name of “harmonization”) in virtually all countries of the European Union. The international standard term of copyright protection used to last until 50 years after the author’s death, but the new European standard, introduced on 1st July 1995, increases this to 70 years. (After the term of protection expires, the works revert to the so-called “public domain.”) The new European legislation is retrospective, so that many famous early 20th-century authors are having their copyrights revived.

The Great Copyright Plot

Patrick Parrinder

For the great-grandchildren of some of these authors, it must feel like winning the National Lottery.

There is another area in which copyright is currently being extended, though this time without any obvious legal sanction. Authors or would-be authors of sequels, spinoffs and other forms of imitative fiction (like those listed in *Interzone*’s “Spinoffery” column) are coming under increasing pressure to get copyright clearance. Already, some publishers are unwilling to commission spinoffs because they think the cost of getting permission will be too high. The copyright world used to be one in which honesty and fair play were the norm, but nowadays virtually everything is for sale if the price is right. Finding out whether or not the sellers actually own the rights they want to sell you is expensive, risky and time-consuming, so that the current law puts text users at a huge disadvantage. All of this is bad news for both authors and readers.

Of all literary practices, none has a more respectable ancestry than that of recycling other writers’ plots and characters. Shakespeare is supposedly our greatest genius and most original writer, but he did it constantly. The Elizabethan stage was a collaborative script-factory in which playwrights were never more happily employed than on the Renaissance equivalent of the tenth remake of *Frankenstein*. Yet, under modern conditions, several of Shakespeare’s synopses would have been turned down on legal advice, and the Globe Theatre would have had to put up its ticket-prices in line with the cost of royalties.

Like the Elizabethan theatre, science fiction and fantasy has long been a strongly collaborative field. The writers tend to all know one another, they meet at conventions, discuss one another’s scenarios, and publish side by side in the same magazines. Profes-

sional associations, fanzines, readers and the market all tend to impose a strong sense of collective identity. Writers of sf and fantasy have rarely been involved in intellectual property disputes, so far as I can tell. The money they earned was hardly worth quarrelling over, and in any case – so the legal textbooks explain – there is no copyright in plots or ideas as such, but only in the particular words in which they are expressed. It is this principle which the power and unscrupulousness of modern copyright owners has thrown into jeopardy.

Science fiction and fantasy are now more than 100 years old, which means that they already have their “classic” texts. The ownership and management of classics still protected by copyright is an increasingly lucrative business. Best of all is the kind of classic that gets put on school and university syllabuses and has a captive student market. H. G. Wells, for example, is a prescribed National Curriculum author, though his works are still in copyright in this country. The copyrights were to have lapsed in 1997, but the European Union has now postponed this until 2017. The cost of royalties is passed on to the readers, and – unfortunately for British sf readers – Wells lived another 50 years after most of his classic science fiction was written.

In Britain the recommended retail price of the current Everyman paperback edition of Wells’s *The Time Machine* is £3.99. The Everyman text is aimed at the student market, and its price was jacked up by 49 pence when the corrected “Centennial Edition” came out in 1995. Misleadingly, the publishers describe it as “the only paperback edition available.” One edition that will not be allowed to entrench on their monopoly is the “Penguin 60s” text of *The Time Machine*, also published in 1995 and available in the United States (where Wells is already out of copyright) for 95 cents, or 60 pence. If this text could be legally imported into Britain it would, no doubt, force Everyman to cut their price dramatically – but Everyman pays a royalty to the Wells estate, and Penguin Books (U.S.) does not.

What, then, is the situation for a writer interested in producing a spinoff or sequel to *The Time Machine*? In theory, there should be no problem, as several writers have already demonstrated, including Christopher Priest with *The Space Machine* and David Lake with *The Man Who Loved Morlocks*. The same is true of other Wells novels. Brian Aldiss wrote *Moreau’s Other Island*, the Strugatsky brothers described a second Martian invasion. But when Stephen Baxter was about to publish *The Time Ships*, his recent *Time*

Machine sequel, Wells's literary executors pounced. In the paperback edition to *The Time Ships*, there is an acknowledgement of the Wells estate's permission for the use of "characters and plots" from *The Time Machine* and other Wells stories. Moreover, the front cover of the paperback describes it as "the authorized sequel to *The Time Machine*."

It would certainly be news if H. G. Wells, dead for 50 years, had authorized a sequel from a writer not even born during his lifetime. In fact, the idea that he would have authorized any sequel to *The Time Machine* is simply laughable. That has not deterred his current literary executors, apparently, though they would have done better to keep out of the business of licensing sequels, especially when so many have already been written. To get involved now does provoke the tiniest suspicion that they prefer greed to their grandfather's memory. But what is the legal position?

According to the *Handbook of Copyright in British Publishing Practice*, plots in general are unprotected by copyright. Nor is there any "character right" or ownership of fictional characters under British law. The handbook adds that "with plots there is a line beyond which an action for infringement may succeed," but just where the line is has never been explained. Common sense suggests that it would apply to a plagiarism of the original work, rather than to the writing of a declared sequel, since by definition a sequel cannot be the same as the original. A court would also take notice if the second author seemed to be "passing off" his work as somebody else's, or entrenching on the profits that the first author might have gained from writing or authorizing a sequel himself. But nobody could claim either that Stephen Baxter was pretending to be H. G. Wells, or that the existence of *The Time Ships* somehow reduces the sale of *The Time Machine*. If anything, it is more likely to do the reverse.

Both the legal precedents and the existence of several unauthorized sequels suggest that there is no real reason why any writer should not produce a spinoff to H. G. Wells or any other writer of 100 years ago. But, if the text owners are exceeding their powers in this and other instances it would be a brave, even foolhardy author who decided to call

their bluff. There is no binding arbitration procedure for copyright claims. Even if a case of alleged infringement were thrown out of court, the costs of delayed publication, legal fees, and general financial anxiety would make the text user's victory a hollow one. Publishers do not indemnify their authors against unjustified legal actions, and if copyright infringement were proven the publishers might sue the author for loss of earnings or breach of contract. In other words, potential authors of spinoffs are putting their own capital at risk, while

copyright owners and their agents have little to lose and everything to gain by threatening legal action, whether justified or not. This cannot be right.

The case for limiting the powers of copyright owners is not a new one. In fact, it is as old as copyright itself. Intellectual property rights have never been perpetual – unlike the right to own an unpublished manuscript – and every attempt to make them perpetual has been strongly resisted. One of the great

moments in copyright history is the 1841 House of Commons speech by Thomas Babington Macaulay (who was later himself to become a bestselling author) which succeeded in killing a bill to extend the copyright period to life plus 60 years. Macaulay argued that copyright was a form of monopoly and that, though monopolies might sometimes be necessary, they were inherently evil. The effect of monopolies, he said, "is to make articles scarce, to make them dear, and to make them bad," and the longer the monopoly the greater the evil.

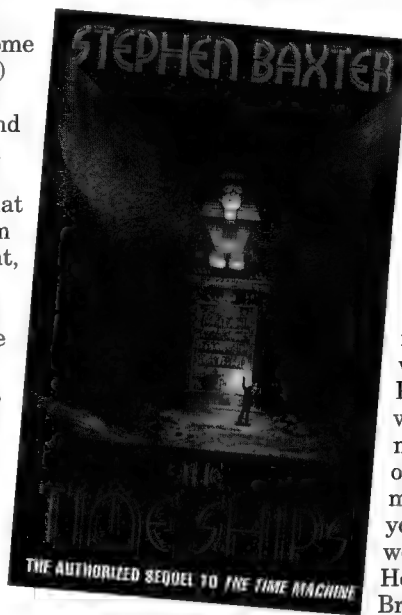
Macaulay defined copyright as "a tax on readers for the purpose of giving a bounty to writers." The case for extended posthumous copyright was not clear to Macaulay, nor is it very clear today, though large vested interests are at stake in it. In theory, the whole sum of money raised through copyright should go to living authors

as an appropriate reward for their labours. In practice, a high proportion of the proceeds are absorbed by the copyright industry – in other words, corporate bodies such as publishers, literary agencies, lawyers, accountants, financial advisers and, doubtless, multinational companies and investment trusts. What do these people care if part of their income comes from issuing unnecessary permissions and extorting unnecessary fees? It is widely believed that the British government's support for European copyright extension came about because of their desire to protect the musical rights in the Beatles' songs. This would certainly not have happened if the sole beneficiaries were George Harrison, Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and Yoko Ono.

The reason why copyright differs from other forms of property is that, by the act of publication, writers both put their texts on the open market and within the domain of free speech. To publish a story is to invite comment, criticism, parody, satire, pastiche and imitation. The history of fiction in general and of sf and fantasy in particular is unthinkable without parody, satire and imitation in very large doses. Much of this would be prohibited if modern text owners had their way. Without the freedom to imitate and parody their predecessors we would have few of the great ancestors of modern speculative fiction – no Lucian, no Poe, no Lewis Carroll, no *Don Quixote*, no *Robinson Crusoe*. If there were copyright

in ideas we would have no modern utopias, no time-travel stories, no robots, starships or androids, no swords or sorcerers. We can go still further, for, paradoxically, if imitation were prohibited there would be no invention and no imagination either. We would live in a new Platonic Republic where much money was made and fantasy was outlawed. Helicon's harmonious springs (thank you, Thomas Gray) would be silent, and on Helliconia (copyright Brian Aldiss) it would always be winter.

Editor's Note: Patrick Parrinder is Professor of English at the University of Reading, and author of several books on H.G. Wells and science fiction. The above piece replaces Nick Lowe's film-review column for this issue. Nick is taking a well-earned break, but should be back next month.



The Rio Brain

Simon Ings &

M. John Harrison

Peter Yale's retrospective opened as planned, with a private view at a gallery on Meard Street. Yale, who was now almost 70 years old and better known as a set-designer than a fine artist, had promised to be there despite his recent massive stroke. Guests already a little unnerved by this prospect found things complicated further by events outside anyone's control. A bomb had gone off in the next street 24 hours earlier. Their approach to the gallery was complicated by lines of orange bunting and amber hazard lamps. Red and white wooden baulks marked the perimeter of the crater. Otherwise there was little to see, although everyone had the impression, caused by all the boarded-up windows, that Meard Street seemed narrower than usual.

"Typical of Peter," someone remarked, as if Yale had done it himself.

"Always in the thick of it, Peter."

"Merde Street," said someone else; and laughed.

Once inside, they milled about making sharp quick gestures, their Timberland boots and Gucci clogs scraping on the bleached pine floor, which was pale and bruised, like skin too long under a dressing. The proximity of the bombsite gave them an uneasy energy. They were as conscious of themselves and of each other as they were of the exhibits. Their conversation consisted almost entirely of other people's names.

"Philip Guston..."

"No no, Giles Gordon."

"...Issey Miyake!"

"Some awful trousers which looked like Thierry Mugler but weren't."

"No!"

"Yes!"

Yale resembled Samuel Beckett photographed in old age: a white disappointed face against the black rollneck pullover someone else had dressed him in. Every movement he made was an old man's movement. The stroke had left him with a pronounced limp and a paretic left arm. He was held together with Camp splints and Tubigrip bandage. This gave him an odd gait to begin with; he compounded it by walking with his hands in front of him, fingers linked, palms pressed together, elbows straight, the way he had been shown by his physio. A beige wool jacket hung open clumsily over his narrow chest. Since he arrived he had been making his way slowly round the room, ignoring his guests and even the paintings. Now he stopped suddenly and began to examine *Girl no. 5*, a piece from his first London show. He seemed to have difficulty focusing on it. His eyes were dark brown, almost black. His expression as he stared vacantly at the picture was one of bemused dislike: but that too may have been the stroke, dragging down the left side of his face under the pitiless lights.

Moira Yale, safe beside her husband's doctor, watched her husband from the other side of the room and, thinking of how as a child she had posed for *Girl no. 5*, laughed.

"He had to bribe me to sit still," she said.

She remembered it clearly.

"Pizza," she said. "I loved pizza."

Lawrence Esterel said:

"You didn't want to sit for him?"

Moira shrugged.

"For God's sake," she said. "I was eight years old."

She said: "It was my father's idea. They were such friends. I sat there like a lump and he stared at me as if he was waiting for something to develop. I felt like a negative in an acid bath."

"At eight years old?"

"I was a precocious child," she said.

Girl no. 5, barely more than a sketch in faded denim colours, sits the eight-year-old Moira a little off-centre in the picture space, looking almost absent-mindedly to the left at something the viewer will never see. She is kneeling. She seems just to have woken up. The high cheekbones, emerging from a child's features, are already adult. Beneath the unbuttoned man's jean-jacket, her thin, ribby body is held in an adult curve beginning at the hips. But her eyes are still too big for her face, and they have all the fantastic strength of will of a child's eyes. At this distance – Yale's gleeful quotes from Vargas, *Esquire* and *Photoplay* emptied out by the passage of time – *Girl no. 5* looks less like a parody than a simple statement of intent.

"He was waiting for something to develop all right," Moira said coarsely.

"Look!" Esterel urged her.

Yale had moved away from the painting and towards *Third Act*, an installation which took up most of the back half of the gallery. *Third Act* was the piece everyone had come to Meard Street to see. In front of it had been placed a row of tubular metal chairs and a low table on which was arranged an artful fan of publicity material. There, as if at his own altar, Peter Yale began to tremble. A faint grunt of effort came out of him. He rocked backwards and forwards. Eventually he managed stoop down and pick up a catalogue; then a postcard, which, split into four frames, showed three other installations and a performance piece from the mid-70s, *Outboard Veins*.

"Let's go and talk to him," suggested Esterel.

Halfway across the room, he stopped and took Moira by both arms and made her look up at him.

"Remember," he said: "Total recovery."

Then he put his hand against the small of her back and propelled her towards her husband.

Soon after Yale's stroke, Moira had learned this about herself: no behaviour – however meek, however infantile – was beneath her, so long as it gave her back her husband. One of the things she had done was sit submissively in front of a plastic-covered desk in an office full of unshelved magazines while she listened to Lawrence – as patient, grave and handsome as a young Catholic priest – explaining the techniques he had imported from Rio.

"I'm sure I'll never understand."

"Never mind," he reassured her. "There's a lot of new thinking here."

Soon after she sat down in the office, she had thought she heard him say: "Total recovery. That's the promise. That's the dream." Now she stared at his clean, large hands. She searched his clean, open face.

"Total recovery," he repeated. "Why should Peter expect less?"

How could she understand? She couldn't. Nobody "recovers" from a stroke so massive. But in the end it was enough for her that Lawrence believed her husband could be cured. It was as important as medicine – surely? – that, full of such enthusiasm, so full of himself, the doctor would not allow her to disbelieve. And the CAT scans were like icons. When you looked, there were Peter Yale's stigmata, plain as the nose on your face.

"Look!" Lawrence urged her.

The first had been taken 36 hours after the stroke. Blood-flow in a vessel feeding the right hemisphere had become occluded for a period of six and a half hours. Starved of oxygen and glucose, the temporo-parieto-occipital region had begun disintegrating almost immediately. Eventually the blockage in the blood vessel gave way, allowing blood to haemorrhage its way into the softened tissue, causing further damage. Within 24 hours, Yale's brain was so swollen, the pressure alone caused damage to sites on the left hemisphere.

Scans taken a week later looked less dramatic: pressure had returned to normal. The haemorrhaged area had liquefied into a cyst of yellow fluid. She

knew it was yellow because Lawrence had told her so.

"Soon," he said, "the cyst will shrink, and with it our chances of success."

He said: "If you agree, we'll operate tonight."

She looked away. A computer and printer, still bubble-wrapped, lay on the carpet behind the office door; next to it, the doctor's Connolly briefcase. Quickly, before her nerve went, she pointed to the bag of pus inside her husband's head.

"What will you do with it?"

He said, "I'll put something in its place."

Someone walked past the office door, whistling the opening bars of Stainer's "Crucifixion."

After the operation, she had taken Peter to Dartmoor to recover. Incontinence and strawberry teas. Apraxia and flower-arranging. Nothing, she had told herself, she couldn't do. She had told all their friends that, too.

New thinking.

No cell in the body exists in isolation. They are receiving instructions all the time, from circulating hormones, neurotransmitters and other, relatively simple and short-lived molecules like nitric oxide and carbon monoxide. Neurotransmitters don't actually penetrate the cells whose functions they affect. Instead, receptors in the cell membrane pass the signal on by activating G proteins inside the cell.

In Rio they thought like this: map the G proteins in a cell and you can control it. You can change its temperament.

In London, Dr Lawrence Esterel thought like this: control cell replication through Gs and Gi, and you might grow Peter Yale a second brain...

By the time Moira and Lawrence caught up with him, Peter was trying to sit down in front of *Third Act*. Moira stepped forward, slipped an arm around her husband's waist, applied a gentle pressure; while Lawrence took him deftly by the shoulders and eased him down. Yale, unable to see who was helping him, lost confidence, spasmed, began to tremble.

"Careful, Peter," Lawrence said.

"Who the fuck are you."

"Do help, Peter," said Moira.

"Who the fuck are you."

"There!" said Lawrence.

"Who the fuck are you."

"Now put your arm –"

"Who the fuck are you!" demanded Yale; but he allowed them to deploy the paretic left arm across the back of the seat next to him. With the weight of his upper body thus supported, he looked to Moira as he had always looked. Even the droop to his mouth was for a brief moment barely noticeable. Settled, he seemed to remember why he had come. Moira – who had no interest in the piece, which had always seemed to her to lack any human quality whatsoever – watched him carefully. But what he made of *Third Act* now, when he could not even draw a stick figure without leaving off the left-hand limbs, was impossible to tell. New thinking from Rio had accelerated his physical recovery. New thinking had regenerated his

gag reflex, his sense of balance, his ability to swallow. New thinking had normalized his posture at an unprecedented rate. But he could signal only rage and frustration. For the rest of it, who knew?

At any rate, he seemed to tire of the installation as quickly as everything else, and began shuffling about on his chair. Sensing her own disappointment as if it was his, excited by it as the detective is by any clue, Moira put her arm around him.

"Do you want to get up, dear?"

He shook her off.

"Who the fuck are you?" he said.

"Oh, Peter –"

"He's tired," Lawrence Esterel advised her. He said to Yale: "Do you want to get up?"

Yale began to rock backwards and forwards autistically, striking the legs of his chair against the wooden floor.

"Peter!" said Lawrence, trying to catch his attention.

"Who the fuck are you."

From the pocket of his blazer, Lawrence drew out a small plastic puzzle, five or six little red pieces which, interlocked, would make a duck or a cow, a biplane or an old-fashioned racing car. He let Yale see it there, scattered across the palm of his scrubbed and beautifully cared-for hand.

"Here," he said, "Do you want this?"

"Who the fuck are you."

Moira, who had once loved Lawrence's hands, now thought she hated them. She wanted to scream with impatience. She bit her lip instead.

"Peter," said Lawrence, waving the puzzle about in front of Peter Yale's face.

"Who the fuck –"

"Thank you," said Lawrence, firmly.

"– are you?"

"Thank you."

"Who –"

Lawrence reached out and put a restraining hand on Yale's shoulder. "Thank you," he said.

Yale said, "Who the – thank you."

"Thank you."

"Thank you," Yale repeated.

"Thank you."

Yale said, "Thank you," and Lawrence let go of his shoulder.

"Thank you," said Lawrence. He said: "Give it to me, please."

Yale swallowed, frowned, concentrated.

"Thank you. Give it to me, please."

He held out his hand. Lawrence dropped the pieces into his palm. Peter, demoralized by his inability to slot them together, would soon lose his temper. Moira would retrieve the puzzle from the beige woollen Berber in their living room, assemble it without thought, drop it into a shoebox in the cupboard under the stairs along with the simple wooden jigsaw puzzles which spelled his name and hers. A child's toys under the stairs. She had begun by keeping these things for the time when Yale would find them useful. Now she kept them because to throw them away would be like throwing away her hope. To begin

with, she had felt it just that Yale should become her child (for as long as she could remember, it had been the other way round): now she hated that, too.

Later she found herself alone in the gallery with him. It was eleven o'clock, and even Lawrence Esterel had gone home. Yale seemed glad. She made sure he was comfortable and then went to the lavatory. When she came back he had vanished, and someone had turned the gallery lighting off.

"Peter?"

She peered into the darkness.

Heat lent the air a thick, textured consistency, as if it had been smeared on to the room impasto.

"Peter, are you there?"

Why the lights were out she could not imagine.

"Peter?"

Third Act had begun as a theatre set, built in 1968 for the radical Peter Brook revision of Kruchenykh and Matyushin's Soviet opera "Victory Over the Sun". It comprised several blocky structures, stacked, stepped and connected by various catwalks, ladders and flights of stairs on which had been located a minimal cast. Abandoning Kazimir Malevich's celebrated original designs in favour of an unknown artist whose visual style derived from mathematical games, Ames rooms and Skinner boxes, Brook had outraged both theatre purists and the politically literate. The new set had this quality: at first glance none of the actors appeared to be of human scale. Some seemed huge, others dwarfish. But at a critical distance – this varied from viewer to viewer, so that no two audience accounts of the play ever matched – it became clear that it was not the figures themselves which differed in size. Normative ideas of space had been ferociously transgressed as Yale's interplay of blocks and stairs undercut the "true" perspectives of the stage.

Since 1968, Yale had installed the piece in various forms in Europe: beginning in Munich in 1973 with *Sited & Blind*, a clear perspex model at one-third scale, in which the actors were replaced by flat cardboard figures. The present version, which was full size, had been sprayed with grey cement to give it mass and brutality. Thick bundles of electrical cable surfaced from one block only to disappear suddenly into another. An arrangement of shallow rubberized troughs and hidden pumps moved long, erratic trickles of mercury up and down the catwalks. Perhaps most importantly, the live actors and representational cardboard figures of the 60s and 70s had been replaced by flimsy motorized metal assemblages, each comprising two or three thin steel struts supporting at head height some object with a metonymic quality of humanness – a pair of binoculars, an automatic pistol, the headlamps of a 1955 Citroen DS, and so on. Cheap servos moved these objects in a limited, jerky, repetitive way, as if they were nervously scanning their surroundings.

Low-wattage bulbs had been fitted in the Citroen headlamps. Switched on and off erratically by a deliberately damaged computer chip, they illuminated a narrow arc of the interior space. As Moira watched, a shadow moved across it briefly. Yale was loose in the

installation, like a minotaur in its labyrinth.

"Peter!"

Moira turned on the overhead fluorescents. The gallery flared with bitter primary colours.

"What were you doing in the dark?"

He turned his head suddenly. It seemed to lock on his neck, as if the light had paralysed him. His face was a frozen white smear, stubbled down the left side of the jaw where he had failed to shave. He looked guilty. He looked shocked. He looked blank. He backed away and retreated further into *Third Act*. He hadn't so much forgotten who she was as failed to recognize her. She felt suddenly empty: as insubstantial as light passing through the lens of a camera. She felt as weary as light. If she was not to flicker away and be spent, she must force herself to perform some action. She switched the striplights off again and sat down in front of *Third Act*.

It was an environment. It was urban and industrial. It was both threatening and threatened. It was broken and mended. It was at the same time habitable and fantastic. She had never understood it. With this version, said some of the critics, theatrical values had returned to the piece after 30 years, and that was interesting: but it was the mutually contradictory values of danger and habitability which drew the viewer in. As a result Peter Yale was being adopted rapidly by a new generation of young artists and designers: Damien Hirst with his tanks and "life-cycle" machines, Ian McNeil at the ENO.

For some time, Peter moved between the blocks. He stopped in front of this figure or that in the dim undependable light of the DS headlamps. He was whispering secretively to himself. The child's puzzle was in his fingers. Eventually he came and stood at the edge of the installation and looked down at her. He said: "I –"

"Peter," she said.

He blinked.

"Peter?"

From his good side he looked like an ageing little boy, always confused, always in need of help, always finding things so hard.

"It's me, Peter. Moira."

"Yes, I –"

He caught sight of the puzzle in his own hands. He looked surprised; then, sensing some imminent crisis, frowned and put it away in his pocket.

"You forgot again," she told him sadly.

He fumbled for a reply.

"I shouldn't have let Esterel do this," she said. "It isn't helping."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I –"

"I know: I know all that. But every time you forget me I might as well be dead."

"I try," he said.

"So do I. It's not going to work, is it? We aren't going to work any more."

For a moment the good side of his face was full of intelligence.

"Pardon?" it said.

Then he opened and closed his mouth: produced a silence: gave up and studied his feet. He took the

puzzle out and began to fiddle with it again. Moira got up. She felt herself stand up. She watched with curiosity as her body propelled her towards the gallery door. There she turned back, to apologize, or ask for something. She switched the gallery lights on. But what she said was:

"Well, be in the dark then."

She called: "Be in the bloody dark."

All he did was sit there in the bright empty wash of illumination, like a suicide in a bathroom. Busy about the puzzle, his fingers looked clever and fluid for a moment; then he dropped the pieces. He was bending forward very slowly and carefully to retrieve them when she closed the door on him and stepped out on to the pavement.

Soho was quiet and dark. A siren dopplered along Old Compton Street. From somewhere nearer came the abrupt, attenuated drone of a car. Nothing else. She walked slowly and unsteadily past the bomb damage. There were figures moving about behind the plastic cordon: workmen in steel hats, with radios clipped to their belts. She stood and watched them as they stumbled about the crater in semi-darkness. Their actions seemed half-hearted and random, as though they were concussed.

She turned on to Dean Street and then Bateman Street. At the junction with Frith Street, where she had parked her Toyota, she thought something touched her hand; she looked back but there was no one there. She unlocked the car and stood by it. Light from dell' Ugo's spilled warmly over her. She took the mobile phone out of her handbag and called a familiar number.

"Lawrence," she said.

She said: "I really need to see you."

Esterel's thinking went like this –

The Rio cells already have the skills they need to function. They can tap into the circulation of the blood. Finer tuning might teach them about lymph. Getting your new brain to look right – 20% neuronal tissue webbing on a sponge of 80% glial cells – presents unique but not insuperable challenges. (He actually wrote this. In an application for funding he wrote: "presents unique but not insuperable challenges.")

He thought of it as "the Rio brain."

At that time of night it was a five-minute drive to Lawrence's Chalk Farm maisonette, with its tall windows, taup blinds and hardwood floors of a colour almost strawberry blonde. He buzzed her in. "I'm up here," he called when he heard her feet on the stairs; and then, as she entered the room, "Do you want some of this? It's rather good." He was sitting on the long sofa with a bottle of Absolut vodka, while an Ornette Coleman solo whispered so unobtrusively from the proactive speakers of the Linn system that Moira could hardly hear it. In the morning, she knew, sunlight would filter restfully through the leaves of the London plane in the street outside, enter the room at an oblique angle, and fill the fur of Lawrence's silver-grey Burmilla cat as it rubbed

against the legs of the Italian breakfast table.

She stood in front of him.

"Lawrence," she said, in the little-girl whine she knew he liked so much, "I really need you to fuck me." She pulled up her skirt and straddled his lap. "Like this. I really –" She felt quite divorced from her mouth. "Yes, like this." Like this she was almost insular, contained more by the bones of her skull than by the flesh. He put one hand around her throat and squeezed, gently, the way she had taught him. She thought of her brain, defenceless and anoxic. Dr Esterel, with his touch like anaesthetic. His other hand was between her legs. She looked into his face, then past it and into the street. What was that face down there? There was no face down there. She had no clear idea where she was any more. She heard herself ask, "What are you doing?"

He laughed.

"What are you doing?"

She looked down at herself, everything so disarrayed.

"What –"

It was like this: everything was so disarrayed. Like this: there were no more gestures left to make. If she were to abandon Peter, Lawrence would only bring him back. If she were to throw out Peter's toys, Lawrence would only buy him more. The box under the stairs would fill up again, and Lawrence would always be there too, and her skirt would always be ruckled up like this.

"What the fuck are you doing?" she said.

"I –"

She pushed herself off Esterel's lap and stood up unsteadily. In her mouth was a taste so sour it must be imaginary.

"Moira –"

"I can't even leave him," she said.

She hadn't really left him since the day of her father's funeral. That day her mother was lighting candles one after another, so Moira could place them on the shrine. So many candles. After that the smell of earth from the grave. Then there was Peter at the reception, crying in a corner over the loss of his best friend. She remembered the feel of his tears against her hand when, out of impulses she was almost old enough to understand, she wiped them away. Twenty-seven years she had waited to see Peter Yale cry like that again. "So openly," she had described it to him late one night. "Are you listening? Like a child. Like a baby. You aren't listening."

Now she repeated:

"I can't even leave him!"

Lawrence Esterel stared at her.

"I don't understand you," he said.

Not long after, a late motorcycle courier drove his blunt cone of sound past the house at 80 or 90 miles an hour. She fitted the Toyota into the empty part of the cone behind him and depressed the accelerator pedal. Even so, she was too late: and when she reached Meard Street no one was there.

*In Rio, they were interested from early on.
Their thinking was like this:*

For the new brain to talk to the old one, it must mesh with surrounding tissue. It mustn't have nice, smooth edges. Its borders must be contested, poorly defined, difficult to map; the sort of borders a pathologist would call "invasion fronts." "We need a very specific kind of thing," Enferro, the American on the team, told Lawrence Esterel. The joke was, he said, that it already existed. Meanwhile, in his funding application, Esterel wrote: "Invasive behaviour is a talent all cells have. The placenta invades the uterus. Blood vessels tunnel through the endothelium. White cells break through the blood vessel walls.

"The body," he wrote, "is a battlefield."

"Peter?"

The gallery sprawled under its bleak fluorescents. A fine drizzle fell, muted and bored, against the blind windows.

"Peter!"

Everything looked absurd and inert.

Moira sat in front of *Third Act*, her body slumped and uneasy with the effort of containing her. Her elbows were on her knees. Her hands were tangled in her pale sad hair. Scattered publicity material stirred in the draughts around her feet. "Peter," she said softly, to herself. She had given up calling him. She knew he was not there.

A car door slammed on Meard Street. Lawrence Esterel's face appeared at the gallery door.

"Moira? Is everything all right?"

He looked around.

He said, "Moira?"

He said: "Where's Peter?"

"Peter's gone."

"You let him wander off?"

"I –"

"But we have to find him!"

"Are you enjoying this?" said Moira dully. "Is it an adventure?"

"I'll take the car. You wait here."

"What use will that be? He won't remember his way back."

"Moira –"

"Go on then if you want to," she said. "Go on."

When the doctor had gone, off to save his imaginary patient, and the tail lights of his BMW had bled past the rain-smearred windows, she whispered, "Peter," again, searching in the name for some magic, some key, that would enable her to act. All that happened was this: rain beat hard against the windows, driven by a sharp gust of wind, and the door banged open. Wet grave air invaded the gallery from the Soho bomb site. Moira heard a movement behind her. She turned. One by one, the figures of *Third Act* were switching themselves on. She could hear the servos buzzing and creaking in the dark. Afraid suddenly of what she had become, Moira staggered back to her feet, went to the door, and let herself out of the gallery. In an instant her hair was plastered to her scalp with rain.

"Peter," she called.

A life as an endless *Girl no. 5*.

"Peter!"

An endless life as a nurse.

"Peter?"

She ran so gracefully, crossing and recrossing the street from pavement to pavement, knowing he had nowhere to go. He could be anywhere. He could be slumped in any painful doorway. He could be hurt, and forgetting why. She pitched her cries against the dark all about, her voice as sharp-edged as a gull's.

"Peter. Peter. Peter."

In Dean Street, workmen in crumpled waterproofs consulted their foreman under the clinical glare of newly-erected arc-lamps. Their shouts were like calls for help. Two earth-movers scraped rubble back from the site of the explosion, tugging at tangled pipes and wires, peeling back integuments of tarmac from the wound. Further down, orange strobes bathed the parked-up heavy plant in unreal, cinematic light. She held her hand to her eyes. She turned south. "Peter!" She had a confused idea that the more randomly she moved, the better her chances of finding Yale, whose own movements were of necessity those of a lost man.

Down in Rio they rapidly mapped and redesigned the invading cell, showing how they could use metalloproteinase enzymes to chew a path through the collagen which protects nerves, vessels, organs. They located both the problem and its solution here: metalloproteinases are controlled by a peptide containing cysteine. Strip the peptide off the enzyme and it will bite in anything a hole big enough for the cell to crawl through. Enferro drew a cartoon of the new cell in action and sent it to Lawrence Esterel. "You could put a hole through a tank with one of these little fuckers," he wrote underneath.

Control the peptide switch and you control the Rio brain, its rate of growth, its final size and shape.

Function is another matter.

An hour, perhaps two hours later, she found herself at the entrance of the Bar Italia. High stools: cafe latte: young men in carefully calculated clothes, bleary-eyed from studios in Wardour Street and Great Marlborough Street, watching intently the big flat-screen TV at the end of the bar. Attracted by the light and noise, and by a quick, incomplete recollection of some other cafe at some other time, she entered that long narrow space and went down past the Gaggia machine, past the framed poster of Rocky Marciano, with its triumphal list of KOs, to stand as close as she could to the TV and stare up at it.

(Halfway down, someone pushed past her and out into the rainy night. For a second she thought it was him! But no. Whoever it was had a clean purposeful stride; a head erect. Whoever it was hurried across the road and turned down Bateman Street.)

Jumpy and formless though they were, there was something familiar about the images on the TV screen. She shook her head as if the fault were there. The picture stabilized immediately. Arc light; heavy plant; buildings damaged by explosion. The TV was tuned to an Italian news broadcast, realtime from the site of the Soho bombing. Moira found an empty

stool, and laid her hand upon it absently, still looking up at the screen in case she saw Peter there. She felt something hard underneath her hand.

She picked it up.

It was a plastic puzzle.

It was complete.

Everything tilted and wheeled around her. The metal ceiling fans spattered migrainous light over the walls. Events and impressions lurched together behind her eyes. Everything shuddered and imploded: the box of toys beneath her stairs; the Bar Italia, with its foil coffee packs, Bauli cake boxes and bottles of Corodino; Italian TV, call sign RAIUNO. Everything she had thought and been and felt that evening shuddered and imploded. Dr Lawrence Esterel shuddered and imploded under the force of his own promise –

Recovery.

The puzzle was in her hand. It was rough and smooth. It was crudely detailed, with the body of a man and the head of a bull.

Total recovery.

"Why should Peter expect less?"

Peter. She knew where he was. She knew where he had gone. She knew he was no longer lost. Gripping the little minotaur tightly, she left the cafe. In Dean Street, sections of a crane had been brought up closer to the bomb crater and lay waiting to be fixed together. An engineering team had arrived. They lit cigarettes and talked, oblivious to the rain, eager to start rebuilding.

Lawrence Esterel's thinking on function went like this–

The new brain rides inside the old one, steering it up the learning curve with goads the thickness of a dendrite. Like any new brain it is eager to educate itself. It is eager to inscribe new software in guanine and cytosine. It can learn to walk, on Peter Yale's behalf.

It can learn to talk.

Nestled in the empty sac of its host, the Rio brain makes a new connection here, severs an old one there, and Yale – whose mind since the stroke has been a stopped-up funnel, a great conical press of language unable to speak itself – is soon free again to be what he always was...

Lawrence's BMW was parked outside the gallery with its engine turned off and rain beading its side windows. Moira had expected Peter to be waiting for her in the back seat: but Lawrence was alone. She tapped upon the glass. Lawrence did not move. She tapped again impatiently, the window whined down, and Lawrence stared out at her, his mouth open, his face grey and sunken, as if the bony structures had been removed without breaking his skin. He looked shocked. He looked 20 years older.

He said: "I drove past about ten minutes ago."

He cleared his throat.

"The door was open," he said.

He seemed to consider this. His lips moved silently for a moment.

"Peter's in there," he said eventually. "Someone

should get that door seen to. It doesn't close properly."

"Lawrence —"

"He's alive," he said.

"What's happened to him?"

"It's back. It's all back."

She stared at him.

"He's in there," Lawrence said. He smiled suddenly.

"Something's wrong," she said.

"No. He's alive."

"Something's wrong!" She tried to pull the door open. "You put a fucking *cancer* in his head and told me everything would be all right!"

She walked around the car and up to the entrance to the gallery. The lights were off, the door stood open. There was a voice in the dark. It was Peter Yale's voice. But where four hours ago it had been the voice of the stroke, the low, hesitant monotone, syncopated and puzzled, it was now the voice of the cure, clipped, secure, and full of a tremendous contained elation. The contrast was extraordinary.

Moira leaned against the doorpost, her breathing laboured. There was no space in her for happiness, only shock, and a little curved segment of fear. Rain dripped from her hair, ran down into the small of her back. She stepped into the gallery and went to switch on the lights, her hands cold and clumsy. Then she realized that Yale was talking to himself. She stopped to listen.

"Good!" he was saying. "Good to be able to speak again. To say what I mean again."

"Peter?"

Yale ignored her. He was kneeling, with his free hand clutched to his ribs, in the middle of *Third Act*. Pipes and cables bunched and twisted away from him in the dangerous light of the old set. Servos creaked like rusty metal in a cold wind. The installed objects seemed to move: they loomed up, then fell away, like the things you drive past on a road at night. They kept watch on their surroundings. Under a sudden illuminative shift, one of the blocks seemed to recede a hundred yards into shadow, and *Third Act* assumed the proportions of a darkened old urban battlefront caught between victory and defeat, some avenue in Beirut or Chechenya. Then, under the sputtering momentary flare of a defective carbon arc, dwarfed yet perfectly at home, Yale was revealed.

He was several blocks away from where she had first seen him.

He was talking to a group of metal figures.

He was looking up at them in delight and talking to them.

"Peter?"

"So pleased," he said.

He said: "Meaning is easy."

The carbon arc died. The Citroen headlights regarded him emptily and suddenly swung away, so that he vanished altogether.

"It's easy to speak."

"Peter!" she shouted.

She forced herself to climb in among the blocks in the dark.

"Peter?"

Perspectives swayed away from her, shifting and twisting with every change of level, every passing bar of light. A gun aimed itself at her, quick as a cat's head turning. She ducked, but it was already pointing somewhere else. Peter seemed close and then far away. If she looked back, the door of the gallery seemed close then far away. She imagined Lawrence Esterel out in Meard Street, and Meard Street itself very small and far away. There was a smell of the grave in the draughts that blew from level to level of *Third Act*. There was a sense of going into something too large to fit into the gallery — or even the street — and at the same time too small to have an inside at all. And yet there she was.

"Peter!"

And here he was. He shuffled round on his knees to face her. He was alive again.

"Who the fuck are you?" he asked her.

The left hand side of his face had regained mobility. The dewlapped cheek, the dead and sunken eye were gone. In their place, trembling and breaking up because the muscles were so wasted from disuse, was the other side of his smile. Slowly but certainly, something from inside was re-hanging Peter Yale's face.

"Oh Peter," she said.

He knelt there, gazing vaguely at her, then caught sight of the puzzle in her hands. His smile grew warm and mischievous — it was the smile of a ten-year-old boy — and he stood up easily, with no stiffness or obscenities, and walked towards her, and took from her outstretched hand the plastic minotaur.

"Give it to me, please. Thank you."

He turned away.

"Easy now," he told the metal figures. He shrugged. "Really easy to do now."

"Peter?"

He dismantled the puzzle deftly, caged the pieces in his hand. He shook them like dice. He held his hand up to his ear and shook them again. Then he reassembled them.

"See?"

He laughed.

"I can't fool myself."

In a more thoughtful voice he said: "I never could."

Moira snatched the minotaur out of his hand, pulled it apart and dropped the pieces on the floor in front of him. She rubbed them into the concrete with the ball of her foot. She felt the plastic blur and break.

"Solve that," she said.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"You're not going to do this to me, you bastard," she promised him. "Not after all that work."

Simon Ings & M. John Harrison last appeared in *Interzone* together with a short collaboration called "The Dead" (issue 67). Simon Ings is best known for three novels — *Hot Head* (1992), *The City of Iron Fish* (1994) and *Hotwire* (1995). The senior collaborator, Mike Harrison, is known for many books, ranging from *The Committed Men* (1971) to *The Course of the Heart* (1992).

The Hooded Man

Peter T. Garratt

I never worried about Alix French till the night we went to see *The Hooded Man*. OK, before then I worried about her attitude to me. That time was the first I found her being less like an on/off girlfriend, more an unofficial psychotherapy client.

We'd hardly met that summer. She'd always kept me at half an arm's length, even at the start, when we did sleep together. She often forgot our dates. When she forgot to make the arrangements for a holiday in France which had been her idea, I assumed there was writing on the wall.

She rang in September as if nothing had not happened. It was after seven one Friday. I'd just got in after a full day at the consulting rooms. I said: "I feel like a hot tub and a few beers. Interested?"

"N-no. Not that interested in... that sort of thing these days, Owen. You understand that, don't you?"

No, I didn't understand why she had gone off hot tubs and nakedness and everything that followed, but it was clear that she needed me to accept it and keep seeing her. What she wanted was to see a play... a tragedy by Ben Jonson called *Sejanus*.

"Sir what? I've never heard of it."

"Nor had I, till I saw a poster for it. It... just felt like something I really had to see."

I found it in my copy of *Time Out*. "Alix, it starts in under half an hour! No way can we get there! It's too late for anything but a film. How about *The Hooded Man*?"

"What's that, some kind of slasher movie? Sounds awful!"

"No. It says in *Time Out*: 'Dark Fantasy. Sophisticated Expressionist-style post-Batman with great specials'."

"Some kind of sci-fi crap."

"Something we can get to in time!"

I rushed into London. She was waiting when I reached the multiplex. Our new platonic status hadn't affected her style of dress: she had on a denim mini very carefully cut down to a length which scarcely merited the term "skirt," and a red halter under a black leather jacket. She wore far too much makeup, like lamb dressed as mutton-dressed-as-lamb.

A big 3-D effect poster for *The Hooded Man* dominated the foyer. A dark figure leaped from it toward the viewer, seeming to spring onto a flat roof over the parapet. Behind was a deep blue twilight sky, with Venus, helicopters and skyscrapers, one burnt out. The figure wore black leather, the eponymous hood covering his features like a monk's cowl. He was armed with an assault rifle fitted with a device between a bayonet and a switchblade, which could be swung forward into action position. It was caught in mid-swing, thus resembling a scythe.

The focus was the front of the hood, where one would have hoped for a glimpse of the face. Instead, there was an odd, fragmented mirror. Alix had been turned away from it. As I arrived she gave it a nervous flick with her eyes and said:

"Owen, you're an intellectual, a psychologist. Why this comic-book adolescent stuff? Why not something real?"

"I've had real all day! I wouldn't mind relaxing. Besides, you're into symbolism in films. These comic characters have an appeal precisely because they operate at two levels."

"What, they sell tickets and popcorn?"

"They're escapist, relaxation, yes, but comic figures only succeed if they appeal to the subconscious."

She turned to look at the poster. Alix nagged intellectually but she did listen. She said: "You mean this resonates with Jung's concept of the Shadow?"

"That's a good point. According to the blurb, he isn't a conventional hero: '...an anti-villain, a ruthless

but socially necessary figure, a throwback to an age of tyranny versus anarchy which is past but must inevitably return'."

"Hmm. And what's that... reflecting thing?"

"I've heard it's a new mirror-illusion. At first you don't see anything, but if you focus, not on the mirror, but beyond it, you see the reflection your subconscious wants to see."

We stood side-by-side and looked into the dark mirror inside the hood. It had many surfaces, which glittered and shifted as I looked. I remembered to not concentrate on it, but to relax, pretend there were infinitely distant stars somehow visible beyond the hood, to focus my eyes on one of them.

I relaxed till after the point when I would normally have given up. I did see something, a shiny, bitty, distortion of myself. The cheeks were too chubby and the eyes too cold: the unjudging detachment of a psychologist etched into my face; almost disinterest. I didn't like it. I'm not that detached.

I turned to Alix. We were very close. She was trembling, tiny movements but violent, scarcely controlled. Her breath was very short, and there were deep lines in her face I hadn't seen before, the thick makeup cracking. I said lamely:

"Are you OK?"

"No. Help me, Owen."

"Let's get out of here." I took her arm and steered her to the coffee bar. "It made me look pretty scary too. It isn't a technique they should use with this build-up, with..."

"I didn't see anything!" she interrupted. "Nothing. That's worrying isn't it? Nothing in the subconscious is worrying?"

"It's just an untried, untested gimmick that doesn't..."

"Thanks, but that's not what I need. Hold me, will you? Make me feel like I'm really here, I'm real!"

I cradled her against me. Luckily, she still had the leather jacket on. She didn't need me to notice how arousing she could be in just a halter. Feelings of unreality can be a sign of deep disturbance, unless the sufferer is massively stressed. I wondered what stress Alix was under. That close she smelled more of booze than perfume. After a minute, she started to cry.

"Christ, I must seem like a total prat!"

I just kept hugging her, as though she was a client in a kind of therapy too doubtfully correct for me to practice. It used to be the done thing to touch and hug clients. Now, it's in the Forbidden Zone which borders on abuse of power.

What does it matter where you do therapy: in a deep-carpeted office in Harley Street with a desk and framed certificates for mutual protection, or in a neon-lit cafeteria with cellophane and cola on the tables? It matters enough that I was giving Alix help that money couldn't buy.

She dabbed her eyes with a tissue, said: "Christ, thanks! You've no idea... I think it's OK now! I'll make you miss the film. But... if there's anything but that one..."

We walked back to the foyer. She exclaimed:

"Hey, *King Leer* is still on! I thought I'd missed it!"

Later we headed for the nearest wine bar. I ordered a carafe of Laski, and we discussed *King Leer*. It was Shakespeare with the production values of a foundation-year film project. Most of it had been shot in a semi-lit warehouse. The gimmick was to tint the daughters' pledges of love to the king with a strong hint of incest. Cordelia was too damaged by this to pretend: she was shown as a runaway sleeping rough in London.

Alix had liked it. "Isn't it impressive, that just as the post-structuralists are claiming they've written off Shakie's universality and sent him packing back to the tights-and-ruffs brigade, Loaman can pull a whole universe of relevance out of an aspect no one had been looking at?"

"His world-view didn't extend past 16-something."

"Didn't it? Did you never feel that great world-views are too universal to be circumscribed by period, that there's a morphic resonance across time which allows significances to be discovered and re-discovered at exactly the right moment?"

"Well..."

"Shit, look! Hope they don't sit next to us. Dickheads!"

A gang of young men had entered wearing leathers and hoods, spinoffs from *The Hooded Man*. Some had replicas of the carbine-switchblade weapon, and were trying to hold theirs in the scythe position. They loudly ordered designer lagers.

She looked almost as distressed as earlier, and said: "I'm not staying if they sit next to us." She glanced at the half-empty carafe. "I'll get you another in Harpo's later."

Alix liked to join her brother Marcus, the poet, and his literary crowd at Harpo's. I thought it was a dump, whose nearest thing to a redeeming feature was that the people who got drunk there after hours were seldom violent.

Luckily, the hooded men decided to move on when they didn't get the lager they wanted. She relaxed and said: "People could commit crimes dressed like that!" She made a gun with her hand. "This here's the Hooded Man an' ah'm the Hooded Woman an' we rob banks!" She refilled the glasses: "Look, I know I'm being a pain, and you're being great! I've been swimming through a lot of shit lately. I've had nightmares. It's just my... my..."

I mind-flicked through items that wound her up. "Your Dad?"

"Yes!" She nodded: having cleaned the makeup off, she looked her own age. "He is getting married yet again! And that's not half of it! I bet this one won't last even as long as the last. She's *even* younger! And blonder and dumber!"

Alix had taken me to two of her father's parties. Jim French was 55, but managed to look like a well-preserved and fashionable man of 54. He was something successful in PR. He tried to relax his kids by asking people of their age group. As these included his wives, it didn't work with Alix.

When she had been planning her 16th birthday, Alix had rated it a coup to persuade Pam, Head Girl and netball captain, to attend. Alix had a crush on Pam, who had once protected her from bullying. That ended when her parents had a bad row in a room

next to the party. Her father had been flirting with the prefect and attempting in-vogue dirty-dances. The affair began later that night in a beauty-spot car park. Something had catalysed in Jim's mind: with his children grown, he was free to be young again. Pam was installed in a luxury flat near the college she was to attend; divorce and re-marriage followed.

I thought Alix was about to cry again. Instead she went on bitterly: "I was just about getting used to the first one. We were sort of talking. Then this monster bimbo comes along. Samantha Fox without the brain. What do men see in these... meat-racks! Why do they humiliate themselves? Lower themselves!"

I recalled my encounters with Jim's women. Pam had been at the first party. She and Alix looked eerily similar. Pam was a more expensive shade of blonde. Her body was tanned and aerobic-honed, but her face was wary, with the suspicious look of a wife who knows she is neither the first nor likely to be the last. Pam didn't strike me as dumb. She drank Tequila and confided uninvited that she probably had married too young.

By the next party, Pam was absent, and I met Margaux, Jim's PA and more. She'd just finished a degree, though she looked too young to have started it. She did look like Samantha Fox, and to me she belonged in some anonymous picture. In the flesh, and her plunging black dress showed a lot of it, I would have felt awkward even if she hadn't been Jim's woman. It was as if a grubby raincoat materialized around my shoulders as I looked at her. I almost checked my pockets for bags of sweets.

I answered Alix: "I quite liked Pam, but Margaux was so young I'd be embarrassed to be seen out with her myself. I'd make her take ID with her to get into pubs."

"That's it. It's obscene. Another carafe? There's something else I want to ask you about, something important."

It was late, but neither of us was in the mood for an early or sober night. While Alix was at the bar, I reflected that I hadn't spoken with Margaux. Jim had given what little attention he could spare from her to Marcus, whose new volume of poetry had been very well received, at least in the papers which only review books no one will actually buy. We'd left early.

As soon as she returned with more wine, Alix said: "Now, I want to pick your brains. What do you know about Tamar Louis?"

"The Recovered Memory woman? A little: I read a piece about her. She's not a qualified clinical psychologist."

"Bad girl!"

"She tried to train as a lay analyst but fell out with her supervisor. Her crowd say Freud suppressed evidence that some of his patients really had been sexually molested as children."

"But who would do that? What kind of parent? What sort of pervert!" She was twisting the end off a cellophane packet of tissues, tearing the tissues more than the packet. "Look. The editor of *Lad About Town* wants to book me into one of this woman's workshops. I think he wants a knocking piece."

"You mean these mags print stuff that's not about

knocking?"

"Some, to look respectable. He pays well, a month's mortgage for a weekend's work. But he wants someone to say sex is great, abuse is a conspiracy dreamed up by hysterical dykes."

I knew she was short of money. "You might want to say the Louis woman's on the level, have problems with this editor?"

She nodded. I thought hard about how to answer. Alix was more than falling-out-with-an-editor tense. Something I didn't know about had gone wrong: I'd assumed it was recent, but maybe recent was just when it had started moving towards the surface. I said: "This won't be like doing an aerobics class and writing about sweat and aches. Most of these people will think they do have memories to recover. Some will have partial amnesia for their childhoods. Your problems started when you were 16."

"So!" she said bitterly. "So you can be at school, totally dependant on your family, and not be a child! You can know your father's abusing your best friend, that's what it was, abusing Pam, we were both just too stupid to understand it then, and that's not in any way being abused yourself? I'm signing up!"

She asked me to take her home. I agreed, not knowing what to expect. What I got was a fold-out couch. I woke with a slight hangover. Alix appeared while I was making coffee. She said: "Thanks for last night! You're my best pal!"

I tried a thin smile. Best pal wasn't quite what I had in mind. On the other hand, I wasn't really in love with Alix. In the period that summer when I hadn't seen her, there had been an unsuccessful reunion with a very old flame. A very bright flame: so maybe best pal would do. I asked when we would meet next. She said: "When I've got this memory workshop out of the way, we'll go to *Sejanus*." She'd been looking at *Time Out*. "It's part of the RSC programme at the Barbic. It's had raves!"

"The Ben Jonson? Did you say it was a tragedy? I thought Jonson's tragedies were ignored because they're deadily dull."

"He was the big writer of his day. There has to be a reason for that which has been ignored, glossed over..." She could see I wasn't impressed, and her tone sharpened: "Look, I want to see this one. It matters to me! I need to see it!"

She indicated a full-page advert for the play. It showed a marble bust, perhaps of a Roman Emperor, with a classical theatrical mask concealing the face. It was a striking but very sinister image. I was surprised, after her reaction to the *Hooded Man* poster, that it appealed to her. Her super-fragile mood had suddenly returned. Never having heard anyone so determined over something so trivial, I agreed to go.

We met a couple of weeks later at a wine bar near Victoria. She didn't say anything about magazines or money, let alone plays by Ben Jonson. Instead she handed me an article to read in draft-quality dot-matrix titled "Lost and Found Weekend."

The first part was very introspective, seeming

mainly to be about Alix's anxieties at attending the Tamar Louis Memory Recovery workshop under false pretences. Some participants had disclosed severe abuse without any form of hypnosis, and though very moved by their distress, Alix had wondered why elaborate efforts to recover memories were necessary.

The focus shifted to a woman who could not explain why, as an adult, she kept returning to violent relationships. Tamar had used hypnosis: after recovering some innocuous material, she got to a point where the remembrenee described being taken to a ruined church by a group of masked strangers; including a Voodoo Priestess and a Red Indian witch doctor. The most sinister figure of all was the leader of the cult, a figure who wore a horned mask and was referred to as the Great Ram.

The typescript broke off abruptly. Alix had been reading over my shoulder, white under her makeup. I said:

"She remembered being abused? What, by the Great Ram?"

"By the Indian. She'd been having nightmares about it. She didn't say he was a real, ethnic Indian, Native American, just some pervert in a mask. He raped her. Took her virginity. I don't know about the others. One was bad enough. Tammy felt the details of that were less important than finding out how she came to be there, whether someone she trusted betrayed her."

"Her parents? The implication is, her parents were in league with Satanic abusers?"

Alix shrugged. "Maybe not in league. That's not clear yet."

"Yet? You mean there's some follow-up to this?"

"Oh yes. Tammy is over here for quite a while, she's too responsible to do hit-and-run workshops. Of course she offered Jane follow-up sessions." She paused, then added in a matter-of-fact voice: "As it happens, she was sensitive enough to see that I was feeling low and in need of something."

I had a bad feeling then. Sometimes people tell you their mistakes in advance, challenge you to talk them out of them. With lovers and pals, it hurts especially. I said cautiously: "So you want my advice?"

"You're a *qualified* shrink who works in Harley Street."

"No one's *really* qualified in hypnosis. The more they claim, the less they know. I'm very cautious when I use..."

She said: "I need this, Owen. I've had nightmares too... I think when I freaked out over that Hooded Man poster, it was connected. You think you've forgotten bad dreams, then..."

"There *are* false memories. In one case someone seemed to remember a double murder. Years before. She took the police to where the bodies were supposed to be buried. There were no bodies, and the victims she named had never existed."

"I see. Were you there, when all this happened?" I opened my mouth to reply, and she said: "Because I saw sensible women – not dreamers – remember weird, terrible, real things!"

"OK. What do you make of this? Some people can be persuaded they can remember past lives under hypnosis!"

"Well of course *you* wouldn't believe in those!"

"Not if they were supposed to be lived in Atlantis, no!"

"Well it so happens I too read up on past lives. Lots of them weren't anything like Atlantis, they were just ordinary people." She calmed down a bit. "Don't you think it's possible that if a crime, an abuse, is real enough, it could burn itself into the collective unconscious, so people in later generations can't help but know about it, can't ignore it?"

"Look. This woman regressed to the age at which kids pass horror novels round under their desk lids. I can remember a Dennis Wheatley in which there was a Great Ram and the heroine infiltrated the cult and had sex with an Indian..."

Alix interrupted: "Look. You're a pal and a bloody good shrink, but so's Tammy. Something's made me start seeing sex as something evil, revolting. If I ever get over that, and I can't make it a promise, then you're in the frame, which means you can't be my shrink. But you can... shadow. That is a promise!"

In fact I didn't see Alix for weeks. I left messages on her machine which weren't returned. Then, one Friday, I received an invitation card: to her brother's CD launch, that very evening. Marcus was a poet from the generation hailed as "the new rock and roll." He sold lots of volumes to publishers, almost as many to the public. He got good reviews, and in return reviewed others. He'd made a poetry-with-guitars CD: *Blood on the Axe*.

I rushed in late. The room was already full, but Alix wasn't there. Marcus's poems were displayed on boards round the edge. Things like: "Every Kamikaze pilot/ Wrote a Haiku/ Before he flew." Oddly, the first person to speak to me was Jim French.

"Hi. Have you seen my little girl?"

"Not very recently. Though she did send an invite to this."

"Actually, that was me." Marcus joined us. He gave an almost opposite impression to Alix: she came over as hard and brittle, he looked soft and vulnerable. He normally wore velvet. "She's not answering my calls. I wondered if she'd invited you."

"Surely she did!" Jim said. "You are her beau, aren't you?"

"She prefers the term 'pal'. I haven't seen her lately."

Jim frowned. "Well, tell her to get in touch if you do, OK?"

He circulated. Marcus said: "It is a headache, 'cos it's her birthday next week. It's complicated. Well, there's Margaux."

"I can imagine that would be a problem."

"You just have to get used to Dad growing up more slowly than other people. It's a kind of emotional retardation."

He was distracted by someone in publishing. The party was full of them, types who would have found a psychologist of interest, had they not been surrounded by nets they had to be seen working. I left and looked for Alix in her favourite wine bars. She wasn't in any. I went back in the week, but no luck.

I mailed Alix a card, and on her birthday, Thursday, took a present to her flat in Wimbledon. There

was no reply from the entryphone. I noticed there was a video system as well. I wondered if she could be watching, silently.

Friday night I drank heavily on my tour of the wine bars. I slept late next morning and ignored the phone. I was woken at eleven by hammering on the door. It was Marcus. He wore jeans and a sweater, I thought on back-to-front. He said at once:

"Have you heard from Alix? Anything? Any returned letters?"

"Not a thing."

"You did send her a birthday card?"

"Yes, but nothing's been returned. What's happened?"

His eyes filled with tears. "Look!" He held out a packet. "All our letters and birthday cards, returned unopened. And... this!" He thrust it into my hand, then collapsed onto a stool, sobbing as he said: "It's not true! It's all lies, madness... no, NO! For God's sake tell me what's wrong with her!"

The letter was hand-printed, both personal and formal.

TO JAMES FRENCH, HIS WIVES AND COLLABORATORS:

I HAVE NEEDED AND RECEIVED THE MOST EXPERT PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP TO RECOVER THE MEMORY OF THE SYSTEMATIC WAY I WAS HURT AND ABUSED, SEXUALLY AND PHYSICALLY, THROUGHOUT MY CHILDHOOD. IN VIEW OF THE GREAT DAMAGE DONE TO ME BY THIS VIOLATION OF MY TRUST, MY BODY AND MY MIND, I AM TERMINATING FORTHWITH ALL CONTACT WITH MY SO-CALLED FAMILY. ANY UNWANTED HARASSMENT FROM THAT SOURCE WILL BE MET BY AN INJUNCTION FROM MY SOLICITOR.
MS A FRENCH.

Marcus was still crying. "Please, please, you can't believe it's true. Not a word of it! I would have known! I would have!"

"Have you had any other contact?"

"Just now, but she won't let me past the damned entryphone!"

"She is there, then?"

"I don't know. Some woman answered. Said she wasn't seeing anyone. Cow!" He looked at me with a little hope. "How about you? You say she *didn't* return your card?"

"No. The nearest thing I've had to mail since I sent it is two identical election leaflets from the Liberal Democrats."

That gave me an idea. "Did you try any of the other bells? If not, I'll see if I can talk my way in."

I took the leaflets and drove to Wimbledon. I rang bells other than Alix's. Someone answered: I held up the leaflets and asked to deliver them. Luckily, the person didn't object: I went in and hurried to Alix's flat. She had an internal bell and a spyhole. I held the leaflets near enough the spyhole that someone inside could read them but not see much of me and rang.

I thought I heard footsteps inside. A woman's voice, American accent, called "Who is it?" It wasn't Alix. I

said:

"It's just a canvassing call about the election."

"I didn't know there was an election."

"Local Government by-election. Can I tell you about it?"

As the door opened a crack, I threw my weight against it. It flew open and the woman staggered back. She was about 40, henna-red hair in a pageboy. I recognised Tamar Louis from the article I had seen. I stepped inside but didn't advance any further, said lightly: "The election's in the area where I live. I want to ask the candidates what they mean to do about half-qualified hypnotherapists messing with people's memories."

"Messing... get out or I'll call the police! This is private property and you're here under false pretences!"

"I'm not leaving till I've seen the owner, *Ms Alix French*. As for the police, if they get involved, I'll be back with a reporter from the *News of the World*. 'Satan Therapy Cult Boss in Secret Hideaway with Client'..."

"Please! If you care about Alix at all... she has had terrible problems, but things are just starting to work themselves out. It's at a crucial stage..."

"It's all right." Alix herself emerged from the lounge. She wore white slacks and pullover. "It's only Owen. I told you about him. He's fairly well behaved." She looked at me tensely and said: "Usually. Who sent you? One of *them*, I suppose!"

"Marcus. He's in tears on my sofa at the moment."

"He should be. He must have known about it."

"About what? He doesn't know about anything!"

She shook her head sadly. "Owen, surely you must have suspected. You're a psychologist, you must have guessed – the nightmares I had, the way I reacted to that poster..."

She hesitated, and Tamar moved to her, put an arm round her protectively: "Are you sure this isn't some Fraudian who's going to try brainwashing you? Say you imagined it?"

"He does listen. Look. The hood. That was the key to recovering the memory. I... all through my childhood, I was abused by a man in a hood like the one in the poster. Let's not mince words. I was raped. Half strangled. I'm lucky to be alive. Sometimes I feel I died then, all of me, that my life was stolen from me, not just my childhood."

"Christ!" I said. "You mean it was... the hooded man was..."

"He must have known about it. My father betrayed me, whether he wore the hood himself or not. They all did."

I couldn't answer. At some level, I had known something was torn and ruptured in Alix, like a hymen of the heart which had failed to protect her vital organs. Tamar said: "You do accept the need for extreme care in handling these cases of terrible violations of children?"

I just nodded. I was well aware that sex abuse is both common and damaging. I had encountered many cases where the victim didn't need hypnosis to disclose it, but I found I did believe there was truth in what Alix had said. Perhaps not literal truth, but at some deep level it was true.

Alix must have sensed this belief. She invited me

into the lounge for coffee. I felt guilty and confused, for at the same time I also believed Marcus's declarations of innocence. What I hoped was that the hooded man had been some proverbial stranger with sweets. Alix must have seen her father as all-powerful at that time. He had to have betrayed her, a God that had failed.

It was a strange encounter. Alix was very pale and wore no makeup, but she seemed composed. She served me biscuits as well as coffee, though normally I had to forage for both myself. It was as if I was the ambassador of a powerful country which was about to change sides in a war. Finally she said: "You probably think my letter was over the top. Well, my birthday was coming up, and I couldn't bear the hypocritical fuss they would all have made. I need more time for that."

"But she's doing well," Tamar said. "She's very resilient."

"I do feel I'm ready to start going out again, as long as *they* aren't there. Anything on that you fancy?" I racked my brains for something appropriate, then she said: "Hey! You were going to take me to *Sejanus*! The rare Ben Jonson! Is it still on?"

She fetched a paper. "Tonight's the last night! My treat if we can get tickets!"

I gulped and glanced at Tamar. She only looked a little concerned, so I explained: "I remember a bit on *Sejanus*. I think there was something about him in *I, Claudius*. He was a Roman who was trying to take over the Empire. Some pretty nasty things happened. It was the period when the stuff you're having problems with, murder, incest..."

Alix said determinedly: "Look. I've been through a lot, but it's not going to beat me. They're not going to make me an agoraphobic sitting at home popping pills to get to the corner shop. I want to see this play. It's important to me!"

Alix got tickets by phone for the matinee, the last seats left. She said we were fated to get them, to experience the play. I raced home meaning to read up on *Sejanus*, but spent most of the time I had dealing with Marcus. I had to stonewall about Alix. I said thought I could get the situation under control. It wasn't the whole truth or nothing but the truth.

I drove to Wimbledon: Alix was still in her white outfit, though she had applied a little makeup. Tamar left at the same time, saying she would ring that evening. She said to me: "Just listen to her. Believe what she says. That's what she needs."

We were nearly late. We squeezed past several people into our seats. I overbalanced avoiding someone's foot and bumped into Alix: she froze for a second, then took a deep breath and relaxed, patting my hand to reassure me she was recovering.

I'm not surprised the play is seldom performed. It's slow, and complicated by a host of minor characters. By the interval I was feeling bored, and secretly hoping Alix was too.

We found a table in the bar. Before I could ask how she felt, we were joined by a pompous individual who said he was a Head of Classics. He granted us his views on the play. Emperor Tiberius, he said, had ruled quite well till *Sejanus* started to poison his mind against sup-

posed enemies, including members of the Imperial family. Most of the horror of this period was blameable on *Sejanus*. When he over-reached himself and fell, a reign of terror broke out and his whole faction fell with him, including his own family. Our unwanted companion said Tiberius was a tyrant and lecher, but had some legal authority and was a necessary figure in a society unready to hold together by consent. The ambition of *Sejanus* was an anarchic force which had to be restrained by all means, however ruthless.

The second half began. Alix was absorbed, though she had contributed little to the discussion in the bar. I was bored, losing track of the many minor characters. At last it moved to a conclusion. *Sejanus* went to the Senate, deceived into thinking he would be named as the next Emperor. From *I, Claudius* I recalled that in fact he would be branded a traitor.

I became aware of Alix's breathing. It was fast and loud, she was hyperventilating badly. Other people were turning to see what was wrong. Suddenly she stood and ran down the row, the wrong way, treading on people, not apologizing or excusing herself. I had to do that, hurrying after her.

She came out of the row limping, having lost one shoe somewhere. She kicked off the other and carried it, running on out of the auditorium. I followed her across the foyer and out into the street. She was slowing down, barefoot, her expression saying there was nowhere to run on to. She turned to me and gasped: "Go on! Say it! You think I'm mad!"

"There's nothing mad about having a panic attack in a..."

"You think I imagined it all! Hallucinated it! That Tammy and the group brainwashed me into believing my illusions!"

I started to half-deny that, and she rushed on: "Well I do! A lot of the time! I don't know what to believe! I have real, solid memories I didn't have a few weeks ago. Memories of things my family *couldn't* have allowed to happen! Wouldn't! What am I to believe? I think it'd be easier to go mad!"

She calmed just a little. "You promised to help. Shadow my therapy. Not let anything *half-qualified* do damage to me. Well, this is the time. You sometimes use hypnosis. Carefully!"

"Yes, I..."

"This is the time. Now! Unravel what's happened to me, whether anything's been put in my mind."

We went to Harley Street. I'd worked late at the consulting rooms often enough, but I'd never arrived and unlocked late on a Saturday afternoon, just after the clocks changed, when it was already nearly dark. There was no time to arrange a chaperone... Alix had done a U-turn and decided she did not want Tamar or any of her group to be present. She agreed that for my own protection, I could make a video of the session.

It took a long time to calm Alix and get her into a hypnotic state. Eventually she started to breathe easily. I gave her a lot of time, slowly deepening the trance. Eventually I told her her hand was light as a feather, and it floated up.

"Now," I said. "Now I want you to remember a time

when someone put great pressure on you to believe something that wasn't true. OK. Now, where are you?"

"In the garden of my father's house. In the courtyard." Her voice had changed: she sounded young, pert, but arrogant.

"In the garden or the in the courtyard? Which?"

"Both, silly! Don't the houses of all the patricians have their gardens in the courtyard? In the City anyway."

"I see," I said, though I didn't understand. "Now, who is with you?"

"My father and brother." My stomach belched acid into my throat, and I felt a trickle of cold sweat run down my back.

"You are with your father and brother. Tammy isn't there?"

"No. Who is she? I haven't heard such a strange name. I am with my father. Well, I was, when he said the thing, when he made me believe the solemn promise, the false promise."

"Where is he now?"

"He has gone to the Senate, and not come back. He promised to return soon. Something is wrong!"

"Just a minute. You said the *Senate*?"

"Yes. My father is Lucius Aelius Sejanus. He is Praefect of the Praetorian Cohorts, and the first Praefect to be made a Senator. More, he said this morning he is to be declared..."

"Hold on!" I told Alix to relax, then told her she would come out of trance when I counted backward from ten to one.

I said: "Look, this is out of hand! This hypnosis is ridiculous! You're remembering scenes from the play!"

"No. This wasn't in the play. Not before I left anyway." She gripped my hand and said: "Look! I promise you, I'm no Classics bore, I never saw *I, Claudius* and I'd never heard of Sejanus or his plot. I didn't know he had a daughter. But when I heard the name, I just knew I had to know more about him, how it ended. The play's not the thing. It isn't real. This is!"

I said brutally: "Sejanus was denounced. I don't know what happened to his family, but it won't have been very nice!"

"This isn't about *nice*! None of this is *nice*! But I need to go on. I have to know! Am I mad or what? Please help me!"

"Very well." I took the precaution of telling Alix when she returned to trance, that if I said she wanted coffee, she was to leave her memories and return to her present self at once.

I again told her to recall a time she had been made to believe something which was false. I used slightly different words, hoping she would recall a different betrayal scene, but she went straight back to that fateful day 2,000 years ago. She started saying angrily in her younger voice: "My father said this morning I would be the greatest lady in Rome. I would have the choice of all the best-born and handsomest young men. It wouldn't be an arranged marriage. He said I would be safe from all the family's enemies, but now soldiers have come to the house. They're dressed like my father's men, but they're rough and disrespectful."

Suddenly she sat up straight and shouted: "Who

are you! What are you doing here?"

She was looking across my shoulder. I said: "Calm. Calm down. Who do you see?"

"A horrible man. I don't know who he is. He wears a leather hood over his face. Sometimes he comes here at night, but my father says he's someone I must never talk to, he does things I will never need to know about... No! No! Get out of here! Leave my brother alone! I am Aelia, daughter of Aelius Sejanus, and I command you to leave our house!" Suddenly she screamed at the top of her voice, then started sobbing, saying: "No! No! He can't be! He... No! You can't execute me! I am a Roman maiden! A virgin! It's against the law for you to harm a virgin, whatever anyone says, not even the..."

As suddenly as she had sat up, she collapsed back on the bed. She was struggling, writhing, screaming. I moved forward to restrain her, tried to calm her, but she threw me off, her nails ripping a deep gouge down my face.

Then the screaming stopped, but she was still writhing, making a horrible gurgling noise. I said to her: "Alix! Coffee! Wake up! You want coffee!" but nothing got through. She was thrashing around, her eyes were bloodshot, the flesh around them swelling and livid, as if they had just been blacked. Then blood started to flow from her nose, as if it had just been broken. Horrified I looked downward, and saw that blood was also staining the crotch of her white slacks, already soaking through. In terror I saw that a red line had appeared around her neck. The gurgling and struggling were getting less.

I screamed: "Alix! Alix! Coffee", but her struggles just got weaker. Then a thought struck me, and I said: "Aelia! Aelia! You want coffee now! You want coffee Aelia!"

Then, in a second, Aelia had gone, and Alix sat up, coughing and choking. I sat holding her for ages, dabbing the blood from her face with tissues. After a long time, she said: "So I was betrayed! But not by anyone in this life! By Sejanus! I remembered it all... Sejanus, he wasn't like Dad, but I was like Aelia. I was her!"

I didn't know how to answer that. I'd been trained to deal with reality or imagination, but not this. I could only whisper: "Shhh. Sejanus is gone. And the Hooded Man. They've been dead for 2,000 years."

It seemed to work. Whatever Alix had remembered, whatever had caused her memories, the link to Sejanus and Aelia seemed to give her a kind of peace. We took the videotape to her flat and showed it to Tamar Louis, who was suspicious at first. Then it was my turn to say: "Just believe her!"

Alix has never doubted that she was Aelia. She spends her holidays in Italy now, looking for her earlier ego's grave. She makes quite a good living from articles about reincarnation. She speaks to her father and brother but isn't close to them. She writes small, sad poems with a classical feel, like Latinized haikus.

Peter T. Garratt's last story here was "Like a Rolling Stone" (issue 101). He was born in Brighton, where he continues to live, and he is, of course, a clinical psychologist.

LEIGH BRACKETT

Brian Stableford

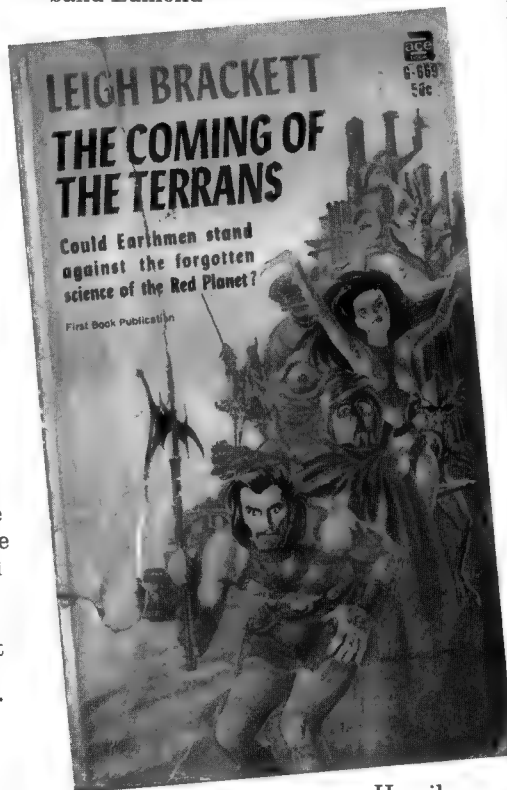
Leigh Brackett was born in Los Angeles in 1915 and grew up on the shores of Santa Monica Bay. In the early 1920s, some time before the birth of the first specialist sf pulp magazine, she came across a copy of *The Gods of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs and experienced the kind of revelation which was later to convert many other young readers to the marvellously expanded world-view of science fiction. She had been fortunate enough to avoid the rigorous canalization of attitudes which generally reserved this kind of revelation to boys, having always been a solitary child and something of a tomboy. (John L. Carr's excellent biographical monograph *Leigh Brackett: American Writer* [1986] suggests that Brackett made every effort to be different from her excessively dependent and relentlessly feminine mother – her father had died when she was three – and that this determination diverted both her reading and her writing into traditionally masculine fields.)

After graduating from high school Brackett spent a couple of years teaching, but could not adapt to the work and quickly decided that she would attempt to make a living writing for the pulp magazines. Initially she found it hard going, being unable to produce convincing pastiches of the kind of adventure stories which filled the pages of the top-selling titles. Although she had travelled widely within the USA she knew little about foreign lands, but exotic settings interested her far more than familiar ones. It was a logical step for her to progress to settings so extremely exotic that no one else could possibly know any more about them than she did.

The crucial turning-point in Brackett's embryonic writing career was making contact with Henry Kuttner, who was then working for a literary agency which offered a kind of training-course to would-be clients. Kuttner – who was only a year older than Brackett and had only recently begun selling work to minor pulp sf magazines – took Brackett in hand in 1938. The detailed advice which he

thoughtfully compiled for her may well have done him as much good as it did her, because the quality of his own work underwent a dramatic improvement in the next few years.

Although Kuttner moved to New York in 1940 – where he soon married another pulp fantasy writer, C. L. Moore – he was able to introduce Brackett to the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society. There she met another fledgling writer, Ray Bradbury, and several well-established ones, including Robert A. Heinlein, Jack Williamson and her future husband Edmond



Hamilton. It was not until 1946 that Brackett married Hamilton (somewhat to the surprise of their mutual friends), and in terms of the development of their work her friendship with Bradbury was much more significant; the influence they exerted upon one another by reading and commenting on each other's work was considerable and long-lasting.

Brackett's first professional sale was "Martian Quest," which appeared in the February 1940 issue of John

Campbell Jr's *Astounding SF*. It features an arid Mars whose human colonists live in inhospitable Reclaimed Areas under constant threat from giant lizards; its cursory plot involves a harassed colonist who comes up with a possible method of boosting the reclamation programme.

Brackett tried to sell other stories to Campbell, but this kind of plot – involving a technical problem solved by a speculative brain wave – was not her forte. "The Treasure of Ptakuth" (*Astounding*, April 1940) is a more romantically-inclined tale featuring a marvellous machine left over from the Martian equivalent of Atlantis, which confers immortality at too great a price and is conveniently lost. This story marked out the direction in which Brackett's work was to go, dedicated ever-more fervently to the elaborate description of a decadent Mars rich in legends and miraculous relics, whose vivid heritage is being slowly obliterated by utilitarian colonists and conquerors.

John Campbell's brand of science fiction was, of course, wholly consecrated to the cause of such conquerors and colonists but Brackett was inclined to take the other side. John Carr records that she was part-Amerindian, and observes that her western novel *Follow the Free Wind* (1963) adopted an unusually sentimental and quasi-elegiac view of the Native American experience in the face of the inexorable obliteration of traditional ways of life. Her science fiction, unconfused by the complex politics of diplomacy which governed accounts of the American West, was able to translocate this sensibility into neutral territory: territory which Brackett was able to elaborate according to the lush proclivities of her own imagination.

Brackett's third sale was to the recently-born *Planet Stories*, which specialized in uninhibited space operas and gaudy interplanetary adventure stories. She went on to become one of the magazine's most prolific contributors, ultimately playing a leading role in forming its image. She also sold work to the two action-adventure magazines which took the more colourful productions of

Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. Having found her métier, she only appeared in *Astounding* on one more occasion, with a conspicuously un-Campbellian story called "The Sorcerer of Rhiannon" (1942).

Brackett knew that the image of Mars popularized by Percival Lowell, which Edgar Rice Burroughs had freely adapted to his own narrative purposes, had already been eroded by astronomical evidence. She understood perfectly well that it was an optimistic fantasy under sentence of death. While Campbell's writers were trying conscientiously to update their images of Mars to make them more realistic, however, Brackett and her one-time protégé Ray Bradbury elected to cultivate a calculatedly nostalgic version of Burroughsian Mars.

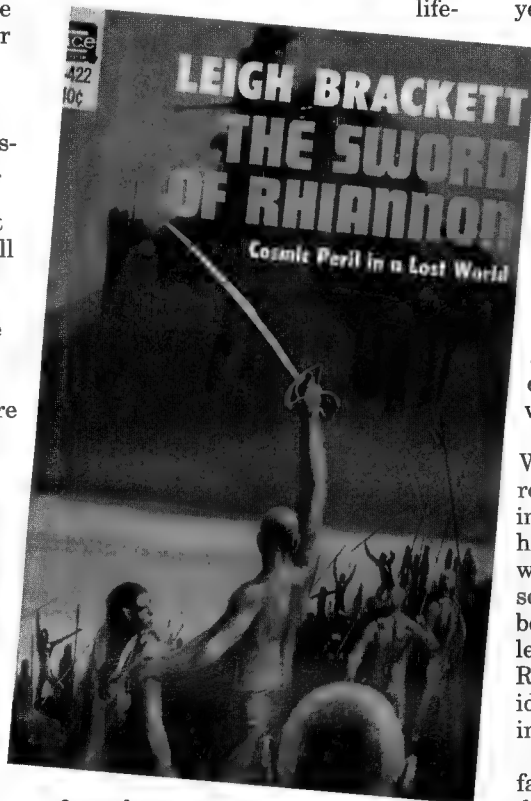
While the old image had not yet been conclusively killed off, Brackett and Bradbury set out to milk it for all it was worth, determined to salvage what they could from the wasting asset. They took Burroughs's picture of an ancient and decadent world inhabited by all manner of strange creatures and they made it even more ancient and much more decadent. Brackett, who wrote novelettes and novellas while Bradbury concentrated on shorter lengths, produced the more extensive and more elaborate descriptions of alien exotica.

In his introduction to *The Best of Leigh Brackett* (1977), which he compiled shortly before his death, Edmond Hamilton points out a "favourite and recurring theme" which is the plot-form of many of his wife's pulp fantasies. It is "the theme of a strong man's quest for a dream and of his final failure when it turns to smoke and ashes in his hand." He adds the observation that "her heroes seek for something they can never quite attain, yet their failure is not really defeat."

For Brackett, this formula was more than a mere device for generating stories. It embodied and enshrined her constant fascination with the allure of the exotic, allied with a deep-seated conviction that the allure in question is essentially deceptive – that it promises more than is actually capable of delivery. Brackett's work in this vein is meticulous in its attempts to reproduce the glamour of the various phantoms which lure her heroes into their adventures, but it is also scrupulous in its scepticism. The reason why her heroes' "failures" are not really defeats is that they usually come to realize that true victory lies in being able to turn one's back on seductive dreams rather than in chasing them to the bitter end of destruction.

The earliest stories in Hamilton's

selection of *The Best of Leigh Brackett* show this formula working in its most elementary fashion. In "The Jewel of Bas" (1944) the immortal Bas lives in a lovely dream-world, waking only briefly to nullify the threat of his vengeful android creations; the human observers of this episode conclude that their challenging mortality adds more quality to life than his luxurious self-indulgence ever could. In "The Veil of Astellar" (1944) a man gifted with a similarly-enriched immortality by aliens lures space-ships to their doom so that his vampiric masters may feed on human life-



force, but when one of his descendants falls into his trap he revolts against his existence, sacrificing himself to destroy the aliens.

Brackett's first sf novel was "Shadow Over Mars" (1944; in book form as *The Nemesis from Terra*, 1961), the tale of a would-be exploiter whose acquisition of power is foretold by a Martian fortune-teller. Having gained the power he seeks, however, he is quickly seduced to the cause of the Martians and uses it to ends very different from those he had initially planned. Although it carries forward the evolution of her version of the planet Mars, the novel is written in a noticeably less colourful manner than Brackett's shorter pieces. This is because the narrative took on some aspects of a much terser style which she had begun to develop in a second strand of her writing: hard-boiled detective fiction.

Brackett had sold a handful of stories to various detective pulps before her first novel, *No Good From a*

Corpse (1944), appeared in book form. Some little while after its publication *No Good From a Corpse* came to the attention of film director Howard Hawks, prompting him to co-opt Brackett – who had some previous screen-writing experience by virtue of having scripted a hastily-shot pot-boiler called *The Vampire's Ghost* – to help the floundering William Faulkner with the screenplay of Raymond Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep*.

This lucky break took Brackett away from pulp science fiction and on to moderate fame and fortune in a far more prestigious medium. For some years her production of pulp sf dwindled to a mere trickle. Her other commitments made it impossible for her to finish the most feverishly exotic of her early novellas, "Lorelei of the Red Mist" (1946), but the task was handed on to Ray Bradbury, who was more than equal to it. Although he was then beginning to develop his own distinctive version of the fantasy-Mars which Edgar Rice Burroughs had recently forsaken Bradbury was able to complete Brackett's work in exactly the same cavalier style with which she had begun it.

When the movie business went into recession in the late 1940s and work in Hollywood became exceedingly hard to get Brackett went back to writing science fiction again. She did so with greater confidence than before, and took up where she had left off in the middle of "Lorelei of the Red Mist," pouring forth her own idiosyncratic brand of pulp romance in a breezily uninhibited fashion.

Brackett quickly returned to her favourite plot formula, but now she developed it with a new verve and extravagance. In "The Moon that Vanished" (1948) – perhaps the best of all Brackett's odysseys in exotica – three humans sail the seas of Venus in search of the moonfire, an elusive phenomenon only describable in Meritresque purple prose, within whose compass any man can create his own virtual reality and rule it like a god. The temptation to which the hero of the story is subject is extreme, but in the end he wins the fight to forsake the dream.

"The Moon that Vanished" was quickly followed in 1949 by three other novellas of a broadly similar stripe. "Queen of the Martian Catacombs" and "The Enchantress of Venus" appeared in consecutive issues of *Planet Stories*, while "Sea-Kings of Mars" appeared in a contemporary issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. The first two were parts of a series which was further extended in "Black Amazon of Mars" (1951), featuring Brackett's favourite hero, Eric John Stark. Stark is an embodiment

of all the masculine virtues of frontiersmanship; he is a noble outlaw, tough, self-reliant and rakish.

"Sea-Kings of Mars" was subsequently expanded into the novel *The Sword of Rhiannon*, whose tomb-robber hero is transported back in time to an era when Mars was fully alive. He embarks with all due zest upon a Burroughsian adventure, which quickly becomes complicated by virtue of the fact that he is "possessed" by the allegedly demonic but actually Promethean spirit of the legendary Rhiannon. Rhiannon then acts through the hero to make good the damage he once did by the careless distribution of his technological favours. Although the hero must, in the end, forsake his dream-world, he carries back a more abundant bounty than any other protagonist of this kind of adventure.

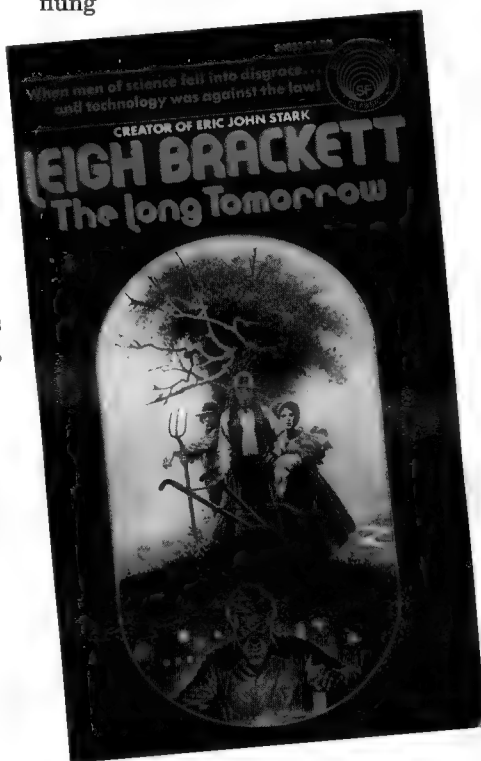
"Queen of the Martin Catacombs" and "Black Amazon of Mars" were similarly expanded at a later date to novel length, as the two halves of the Ace double *The Secret of Sinharat / People of the Talisman* (1964); John Carr reports, however, that the expansion of the two novellas was carried out by Edmond Hamilton, Brackett having by then found new opportunities to work in Hollywood (Howard Hawks had invited her back to work with him again, after a decade-long gap, in 1957). Hamilton, as was his wont, put a heavy emphasis on the action scenes and did relatively little work on the lush descriptive passages.

The middle element of the Stark series was presumably set aside because it took place on a different world, but for those who value exoticism over action it is the best of the three stories, featuring a fabulously bizarre Venus. Much of the action takes place in the depths of a strange vaporous "sea."

Another magical "semi-liquid" is featured in "The Lake of the Gone Forever" (1949), set on the hypothetical asteroidal world of Iskar. This is yet another reprise of the plot formula identified by Hamilton, and may have seemed to him to be too straightforward to warrant inclusion in *The Best of Leigh Brackett*, but it is notable for its attempt to sound a desperately plaintive note of tragedy: a note which was to sound more plangently in Brackett's subsequent deployments of the theme. "The Last Days of Shandakor" (1952) injects a strong dose of bitter "realism" into its account of a human's brush with Martian mystery, emphasizing far more than any of her earlier stories the conviction that life without beautiful and seductive dreams is too arid to be borne. "Shannach—the Last" (1952), set on and beneath the fiery surface of Mercury, is also elegiac in tone,

carefully respectful of the alien race whose doom is sealed by the treasure-hunting hero.

By this time, recognizing that the natural lifespan of quasi-Burroughsian interplanetary romance was reaching its end, Brackett had begun to widen her narrative horizons. "The Star-men of Llyrdis" (1951; in book form as *The Star-men*, 1952) adapts a plot formula borrowed from her husband — which he had earlier borrowed from Anthony Hope's archetypal Ruritanian romance *The Prisoner of Zenda* — in following the mind-opening exploits of an earthly "changeling" whose true destiny lies in the far-flung



galactic empire. Brackett could not, however, match the casual ease with which Hamilton took in the vast reaches of interstellar space and there was always an unease about her more extravagant exercises in space opera. She preferred narrative stages of more limited dimensions.

A similar imaginative leap from local space to the galactic stage is featured in the deftly lyrical novel *The Big Jump* (1953; in book form 1955), but the action gets no further afield than Barnard's Star and the hero's eventual re-confrontation with the alien is little different in style or content from those featured in her Martian and Venusian romances. A literal but similarly limited escape is described in "The Ark of Mars" (1953), which was extensively rewritten — presumably by Edmond Hamilton, although Carr does not say so — in combination with its sequel, "Teleportress of Alpha C" (1955) for the book *Alpha Centauri—or Die!* (1963).

In other stories of this period Brackett reversed the fundamental pattern identified by her husband in several stories of men living relatively mundane lives who are visited by alien intruders. These characters tend to find the allure of the exotic less easy to resist than case-hardened adventurers like Eric John Stark, and their ultimate evasions are invested with a perverse irony. Her best works in this vein include the *femme fatale* story "The Woman from Altair" (1951), "The Tweener" (1954) and the neatly understated "The Queer Ones" (1956). The latter story, which examines the reflexive anxieties of human beings faced with "alien invaders," paved the way for a much more assertive attack on xenophobia in the passionately anti-racist, "All the Colours of the Rainbow" (1957).

How Brackett's career might have developed had she not been called back to Hollywood by Howard Hawks we can only guess, but there is no reason to think that she would have faded away with the pulp magazines that had been her primary market. "The Queer Ones" and "All the Colours of the Rainbow" appeared in *Venture*, which advertised itself as an action-adventure magazine carrying forward the spirit of the pulps, but they might equally well have appeared in *Venture's* companion, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

The last full-length novel Brackett wrote before returning to film work also demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that she could write the kind of science fiction which was to become typical of the 1950s. This was the thoughtful and painstaking post-holocaust novel *The Long Tomorrow* (1955), in which the strongly moralistic and machine-independent societies of the Amish and their neighbours, the Mennonites, form the nucleus of a new social order once the old one has been ripped apart by atomic war. The hero of the novel grows up in a society which hates and fears science, and has powerful arguments to justify its hatred and its fear, but he eventually makes his way to the legendary Batorstown, where the ideals of the old civilization have been carefully preserved and refined. Here, the allure of the "exotic" is placed in a context where it can be entirely constructive, and the dream is something to be seized rather than forsaken.

Although most of her work in the late 1950s and the 1960s was in other media and other genres Brackett was to make one more return to the science-fiction field, whose form reflected the fact that her absence had been noticed and felt.

That absence was, of course ameliorated by the fact that Don Wollheim's

Ace sf line continued to reprint her most interesting pulp work. *The Nemesis from Terra, Alpha Centauri—or Die!* and the Ace Double featuring *The Secret of Sinharat* and *People of the Talisman* were followed by two collections, *The Coming of the Terrans* (1967) and *The Halfling and Other Stories* (1973). The former brought together a rather ill-assorted group of her Martian series, pretending that they constituted a coherent future history extending from “The Beast-Jewel of Mars” to “The Road to Sinharat” (1963), the latter being an apparent attempt to recast the subject-matter of “Queen of the Martian Catacombs” in a more contemporary mould. The penultimate story in the series, “Purple Priestess of the Mad Moon” (1964) had been written around a title which magazine editor Anthony Boucher had jokingly invented to encapsulate the spirit of Brackett’s pulp sf. *The Halfling* is a much more substantial book, reprinting five novelettes alongside “The Enchantress of Venus” and another novella, “The Citadel of Lost Ships” (1953).

Thanks to such productions as these, the new readers brought into the fold by science fiction’s rapid expansion into the mass-market paperback arena had ample opportunity to become acquainted with Brackett’s work, albeit that its presentation failed to conceal the fact that it was old-fashioned work belonging to a more innocent era. It is hardly surprising that Brackett was eventually tempted to take advantage of the commercial success of paperback sf. Nor is it entirely surprising that she should try to do so by placing Eric John Stark in a new exotic milieu, situated in the relatively distant reaches of the galactic empire, formulating his new adventures – according to the prevailing marketing wisdom of the day – as a trilogy of novels.

The Ginger Star (1974), *The Hounds of Skaith* (1974) and *The Reavers of Skaith* (1976) do not really succeed in being less old-fashioned than “Queen of the Martian Catacombs,” “Enchantress of Venus” and “Black Amazon of Mars,” but that was never the point of writing them. They are, however, noticeably darker in tone and import than their predecessors – even more so, in their way, than such stories as “Shannach—the

Last” and “The Last Days of Shandakor.” The fact that the earlier Stark stories echo the pattern identified by Joseph Campbell’s anthropological study of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) is presumably accidental, but the Skaith series is not only clearly conscious of the parallel but keenly interested in its development. The wide-eyed and breathless innocence of the earlier texts makes them preferable in some ways, but the relative sophistication of the

later ones – however ill-adapted it may seem to the gaudy plots – adds a new dimension of fascination.

John Carr records that Brackett began a fourth novel in the new Stark series in 1976 but put it aside when it became clear that Edmond Hamil-

Leigh Brackett was a writer who traded heavily in nostalgia for the dreams and far imaginative horizons of book-loving youth. She did so not in the conspicuously sentimentalized and punctiliously delicate vein which Ray Bradbury made semi-respectable, but in a wholehearted, unashamed and unapologetic fashion. Oddly enough, though, it was Brackett rather than Bradbury who was prepared to admit and face up to the fact that the fantasies beloved in childhood do eventually have to be surrendered and put away. Her work is sadly and stubbornly reluctant to complete that task, but always recognizes its inevitability.

Brackett was, after her own fashion, a writer of escapist fantasies, but her work nevertheless retains and insists upon a keen awareness of the treasonous tendencies of escapism. It consistently takes care to celebrate the strength of character which is required to forsake the wilder excesses of self-indulgence. Everything one might expect to find in stories with titles like “Queen of the Martian Catacombs” and “Black Amazon of Mars” is, in fact, to be found within those stories – but so is a contemplative spirit which examines the appeal that such gaudy dreams have, and which dutifully

acknowledges the wisdom of keeping their temptation at a safe psychological distance.

It is for this reason, even more than the fact that she was able to work in the very different vein of *The Long Tomorrow*, that Leigh Brackett warrants consideration as a writer whose literary voice is authentically science-fictional. That voice is quite distinct from those of her models, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Abraham Merritt. The only work in which she ever subsumed her own voice so thoroughly as to become an instrument of the ideology which she usually

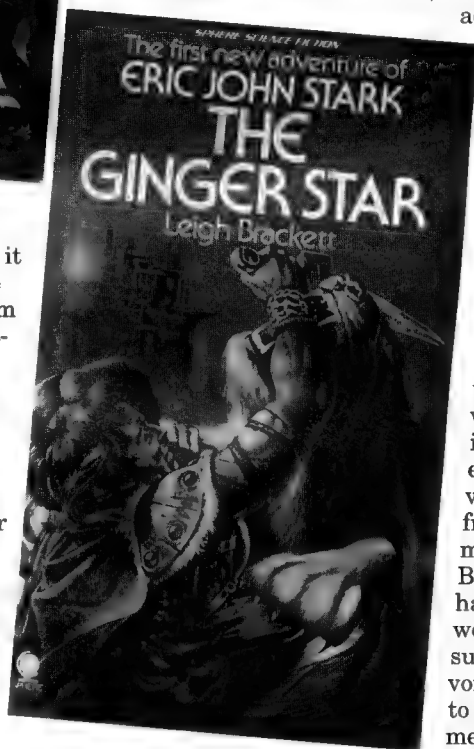
treated with such reverent but scalding scepticism was, of course, her script for *The Empire Strikes Back*. It is the unique qualities of her own literary voice which will ensure that her work remains interesting to the modern reader, and to the readers of the future.

Brian Stableford



ton was dying. She did manage to pick it up again before she followed him to the grave, little more than a year later, but chose to set it aside for a second time in order to work on the script for George Lucas’s sequel to *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Although the film must have reached a much wider audience than all of her other sf put together (as must several of the films she scripted for Hawks) connoisseurs of written sf are bound to regret that decision. It is a pity, too, that the story which Brackett and Hamilton wrote together shortly before their deaths for Harlan Ellison’s ill-fated *Last Dangerous Visions*, “Stark and the Star Kings,” has not yet seen the light of day.





And where the hell was Aimee? Iggy watched the window sign blink, SLOOF FO POHS. Pink neon: Aimee's idea. Merchandise furry with dust: mugs with no handles, plastic alien goddesses, erotic game tokens, souvenir ashtrays of the saurosapiens landing. On card tables, tea carts, smoking stands. Aisles just wide enough for Aimee's hips.

Ripe, pear-shaped, Aimee's hips. Hump-handles. To hold while humping Aimee. Where was she?

Gone with her sister to the Baltimore Saurosapiens Trade Fair. Supposed to bring back some of those fancy barf-gems. Yick. The junk Iggy would lower himself to sell.

A blonde, in a purple varsity jacket embroidered BETTYLOU, fingered a leaky Lava Lite. Bettylou bored Iggy. Her hips, like a dinosaur's frill, should be labelled "For sexual display." But Bettylou wasn't extinct; she was a regular.

He settled his bony butt in a chair and picked up *Secrets of the Heart*, ignoring Bettylou. The shop bell rang, to his relief. Alone, he thought.

Folly and curses to be horny, thought Iggy. The

urge ought to abate in middle age, yet here he was, missing his wife's soft hips. "Sexy old bugger," Aimee would say, then plant a kiss on his bald head. Where the hell was she?

He looked up.

Oh, Aimee's back, he thought. But it was Aimee's sister Desiree, furling an umbrella and unbuttoning lavender gloves. Desiree, the Baltimore sister.

He stood up, caught her scent. Emeraude. Looked like Aimee's twin. Small waist, wide hips. Fluffy hair, once blonde, now dyed orange-pink. Thin, lively lips, painted burgundy. Juicy tits (he had peeked at Desiree's), heavy enough to sag to the waist without that fancy lace bra, nipples big as bicycle reflectors, pink and silky as tulip petals.

"They Ate her," said Desiree.

Iggy's gut puckered like a salted garden slug. Aimee? Eaten?

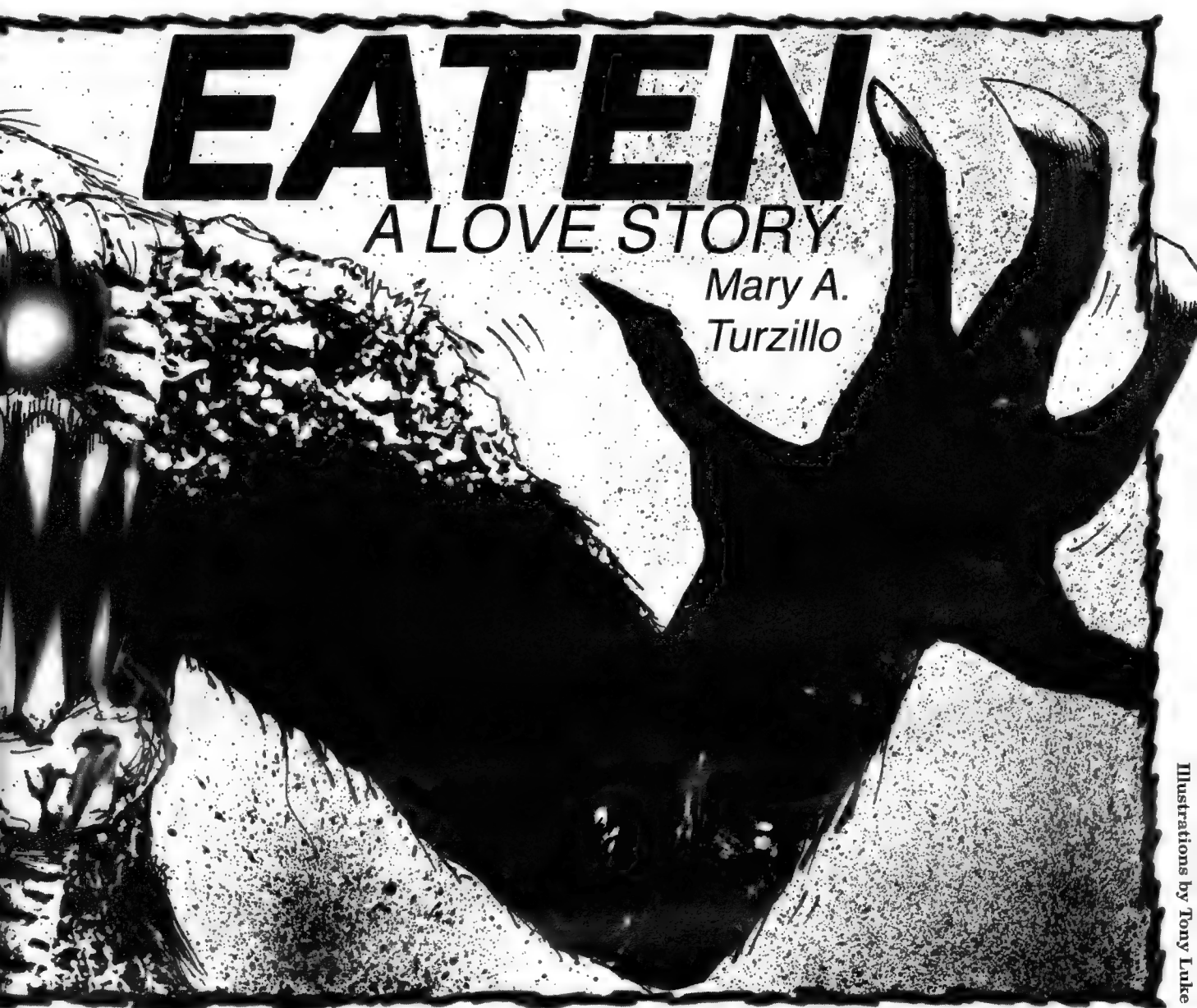
Desiree propped the umbrella against the door frame and fluffed her hair. "Saurosapiens challenged her right in front of the Dollar Bank. Damnedest thing."

"Ate her?" Iggy whimpered.

EATEN

A LOVE STORY

Mary A.
Turzillo



Illustrations by Tony Luke

Desiree placed a pudgy hand on his wrist and pushed past him into the store. "Now don't go all hysterical. It isn't as if she's dead or anything."

"Ate her all up?"

"Witnesses said it was over in minutes. She just ran out to get some suzies for the laundry. When I got there, it was all over, saurosapiens was gone. Said it was a female, a big brown one. Aimee didn't have a chance."

Iggy stumbled to the back of the store. Made it to a rickety bent-cane chair, and collapsed, afraid he would start blubbering. "This is a damn stupid joke."

She folded her arms and stood over him. "No joke, Iggy. They interviewed me on TV. And you can read the police report."

He mastered himself. "Did they arrest the saurosapiens?"

She tsked. "Iggy, you know the saurosapiens have diplomatic immunity. This one was high-placed in their trading guild. Her mate belongs to the International Merchant Police. Anyway, they do this challenge thing with each other all the time."

Iggy got up and pounded the door frame. A splinter stabbed his fist. He sucked the blood. "I need her, Desiree. Need the girl. How'm I supposed to run the shop alone?" He beat the door frame more. "How'm I supposed to pay for a goddamn funeral?"

Desiree sat down, arranging her skirts artfully over her knees. "It's not as if she's dead. You know what the saurosapiens do. Been over 80 incidents like this, the cop said. She's just — changed."

"Yeah. Into a big furry body with claws and thunder thighs and teeth like the bailer on a garbage truck! I'm holding a funeral, Desiree. You better be there, and you better be wearing black. Shit, shit, shit!" He resisted an impulse to ram his head into the door frame.

Desiree sighed. "Stop being a dork. This is a problem, I admit. Yes, your marriage is in trouble. Nobody expects you to stay married to a woman who's sharing a body that looks like a hairy allosaurus."

"What the hell's an allosaurus?"

"Like a tyrannosaurus, only nastier. Pay attention, Iggy! I'm sure there will be no obstacles to a divorce. I won't oppose it. But I am going to look up this Xionjl —"

"What the hell is a zee-on-jel?"

"Xionjl's her name, Iggy. The saurosapiens. The one that Ate her. Anyway, I'm going to petition for communication rights with Aimee. The aliens usually agree."

Iggy thought about something else. "The gems," he said.

"What are you blathering about?"

"The gems. They do that with their digestive systems. I understand that. But eat Aimee and then let her talk from inside? What the hell's the world coming to?"

He thought about the saurosapiens gems he had ordered. Had Aimee placed the order before the Eating?

Aimee! God, Aimee!

Desiree was damned attractive, too. "Stick around for a few days, Desiree. Help me straighten out the legal shit."

She lowered her gaze. "Oh, Iggy. You know my ferrets need me."

When she was gone, he twisted *Secrets of the Heart* until the spine ripped.

"Mister?"

Bettylou, for Christ's sake. Skulking in the gloom.

"Can I pay for this?" Plastic comb decorated with mermaids.

He took her money.

"I think there's a package up front for you," she said.

Iggy stared at the crumpled bill until he heard her go out, then tucked it away and went to the front. Had he missed the UPS man?

A box. The saurosapiens gems. Ah. He inserted a blade under the strapping tape and sawed.

Inside were gems wrapped in cloth bits. Colourful, maybe from the saurosapiens planet. Hm. Could he resell these scraps? Could Aimee patchwork them? She was clever that way. Fat little fingers, good for playing squeezebox or skinflute.

But Aimee had been Eaten.

The first gem took his breath. Cool, smooth, it drew heat from his hand; light roiled inside. He tossed it hand to hand. A storm of sparks inside the stone crescendoed as it warmed. Sensuality overriding grief, he pressed the gem to his throat. There, it purred silently. He pulled it away and reluctantly wrapped it. It called to him, cooling in its silky scrap.

Another, misty grey-green, was set as a bolo tie. Iggy slipped the loop around his neck. He felt it hum. When he took it off, the stone's foggy vortex pulled him in, in.

A third, set in a ring, was faceted. Inside, blue fire zipped on a lattice, point to point. As the stone warmed, the lines raced faster, turning from chaste blue to red.

Oh, these would be hot. Wait till the first customer bought one and showed it to her friends.

Wait until Aimee – but Aimee was Eaten.

Few legal entanglements came from Aimee's being Eaten. Legally, she was still alive. Iggy contemplated seeing a divorce lawyer. But what was the need?

A week later, the phone rang. Would he accept a collect call from Aimee Mayhew? From Aimee? He slammed the receiver down.

It rang again.

"This is the AT&T operator with a collect call from Mrs Aimee Mayhew. She says you're her husband."

Curiosity and horror mingled. "Okay," Iggy said, shakily.

"Iggy! Baby, I've missed you. I'm trying to get –"

Iggy dropped the receiver into his lap and closed his eyes. Aimee's voice, cigarette-deepened, twangy. Aimee.

Iggy blurted, "You had an accident. With one of those aliens."

Her breathy laugh. "Accident, Baby! We had a challenge. What a fight! Don't think I didn't give it my all." She hesitated. "Ig, I'm sorry. I know what this means to you."

"Cut the crap," said Iggy. "When are you coming home?"

"I can't, exactly. Xionjl and I have a place in Baltimore. Xionjl is supporting me for a while, so we have to stay near her job. But we'll take time off and drive out to Ohio –"

"I didn't think those aliens could drive."

"Oh, they can, Hon. They just need special cars. Xionjl has a license and all. I can drive while she's thinking, too."

"Thinking?"

"Or taking a nap. She can sleep while I'm awake. It's amazing." Brittle, sexy laugh. "You should just see us!"

"I've seen pictures. Aliens look pretty much alike."

A long, hurt silence. "You're upset, aren't you? Oh, Hon, I don't blame you. But it'll be all right. You can visit us. Who knows, Sunshine? Maybe you'll want to relocate the shop here. Xionjl wouldn't mind? Would you, Xionjl?"

The next sound made Iggy's bald scalp crawl. The voice was musical, very female, but deep, deeper than a man's. "Hi, Iggy. Xionjl here. Listen, Aimee says you're interested in alien trade items? I can get you some good buys."

Iggy looked at the receiver. What was talking to him? Did it have big ripping shark teeth and claws like a dinosaur? Thighs the size of Ford Pintos, and coarse fur pomaded with the excreta of an alien wart-hog? Did its breath smell like road kill?

"Iggy?" Aimee's voice again.

"Get away from that thing," Iggy growled, like a tea-cup poodle confronted with a huge cat.

Aimee laughed her fake-charm laugh. "You don't understand, Iglet. I can't get away from her. Haven't you been watching TV for the last five years? I got –" She faltered – "Eaten. You saw on the news? Eaten?"

"What do you want?"

"Just to, um, see you. Get things straightened around. Oh, Iggy, wouldn't you at least consider moving here?"

"Are you out of your tiny mind? I can't sell the shop. What would I do for money?" A thought struck him. "Am I supposed to pay for the burial?"

"Of what, Hon?"

"You know, the – remains."

Xionjl's voice came on. "Not to worry. I ate everything."

Aimee warbled reassuringly. "Amazing digestive system! Hooked right into her brain. We'll talk, the three of us."

"No."

Long pause. Then Aimee sobbed, "You're rejecting

me because I'm no longer beautiful. In your eyes. But I still have a beautiful soul, Iggy. I love you more than ever. This could be just a stage in our marriage, something to draw us closer."

"No, Aimee! I don't even know this is you and not some goddamn program the aliens created to pretend to be you."

"Ask me anything. Ask me about our honeymoon."

"What honeymoon? You blackmailed me into marriage by dangling your tits in my face, then saying you had – what did you call it? Something from *Ladies Home Journal*. Oh, 'hysterical frigidity!'"

"I needed your love. I needed you to say the words. I needed to know it was forever. And now –" Her voice broke.

What, Iggy wondered, did Xionjl think of all this?

Unexpectedly, Xionjl's deep voice boomed, "You've upset her."

"Who the hell are you to talk? Crap! Put her back on."

Sniffing. "Iggy? Darling, say you don't hate me. I'm so heartbroken."

Iggy slumped against the wall, defeated. "I'm sorry, Aimee."

"Oh, Iggy, really? And do you love me?"

Iggy felt as if a school of eels had hatched in his stomach. "Yes, Aimee, I um love you."

"Then I'm coming home. Book a room in Betsy's Beachcomber."

"You think I've got money to throw away on Betsy's?"

Xionjl broke in. "Now you've got her crying again."

Iggy considered. He envisioned a ten-foot alien shaped like a Hershey's Kiss lumbering through their apartment above the shop. "All right. I'll call Betsy's."

"Iggy, darling, say something sweet to me. Please. Even if you don't mean it."

He ground his teeth. "You're my sweet baby lumpkin forever."

Aimee screamed, "You fucking rat! At least try to sound sincere. You're humping some teenage slut right now, aren't you?" Xionjl made deep-throated soothing noises.

"Wait till I get my hands on you and find out who she –"

Iggy hung up.

How could she think such a thing?

He closed the shop. On his way upstairs, he grabbed a pile of lavishly illustrated porn magazines. Hair of the dog –

Xionjl and Aimee called midnight Friday from Betsy's. "Come on over," squealed Aimee. "Betsy gave us the unit with the loft."

"Very quaint," added Xionjl.

Iggy was irritated to discover that he had a semi-boner just hearing Aimee's voice. It disappeared when he heard Xionjl's. He was cursed, an old lecher past the age when lechery as a driving force should have vanished.

But he had a deadlier flaw: curiosity.

Betsy's was a century home overlooking Lake Erie. Betsy had hacked it into tourist rooms, adding fibre-glass shower stalls, purple cabbage-rose wallpaper, and fake Victorian prints.

The loft had been a barn, perverted for the tourist trade into a honeymoon suite. Pricey. But Aimee said Xionjl needed the privacy.

When Iggy drove past the house to the barn, he passed an ancient Buick Riviera. Lounging on its rusted hood were three hoods with binoculars. Waiting to get a look at Xionjl.

Xionjl with Aimee incorporated into her brain.

Iggy jammed on his brake and rolled down the window. "Get out of here, you, you –" he was trying to think of the word *voyeur*, but it came out "– rubber-necked vultures!"

Heart pounding, he watched them do a doughnut and squeal away. Trying to peek at his wife, indeed!

Betsy's remodelling had retained the barn doors, but there was a smaller plywood door for guests, with star-shaped windows and a tacky corn-husk wreath. The barn doors, now, were ajar.

Iggy turned off the ignition. He tried to think of a good reason for backing up and driving back home. Out of rationalizations, he got out and approached the barn door.

A faecal smell drifted from the empty front room. Iggy took a deep breath of clean outdoor air, and stepped inside.

"That you, Iggy? Down in a moment." It was Aimee's voice. To avoid thinking about the body that it came from, Iggy examined the room. High ceiling, of course. Cheap red indoor-outdoor carpet. Outer walls weathered wood – Betsy must close the place in the winter, or it would be cold as hell. A steep staircase up to the loft. Inner walls wallpapered with a stag and hunters motif. Garage-sale furniture, upholstered in a patchwork of chintz. Kitchenette under the loft, wallpapered in mushroom pattern.

And a foul smell. Mildew? No, definitely faecal. Maybe animals had messed the carpet. Iggy scrubbed at it with his toe.

In one corner, a huge platform of plywood and bricks. A bed. Big enough for a polar bear or a killer whale. Iggy drifted over to it and realized that it was the source of the foul smell.

Noise from above.

Iggy turned and saw an immense grey paw groping for the top rung of the ladder to the loft. He watched with mixed horror and admiration as the paw's owner heaved into view.

The legs, first. Grey, covered with short, coarse fur. Clever prehensile toes, long nails shiny and dark as sheep's horn. Thighs muscled richly, sinews rippling beneath the fur. A thick trunk, the underbelly muddy yellow. Forepaws which grasped the ladder like bird talons. These, too, had nails, sharp and long. He tried to count the fingers; there seemed to be too many.

The head appeared.

Xionjl's snout was small and sharp, covered with short grey fur except for a white naked area around the lips. As she turned to him, Iggy saw that the mouth was stretched wide in apparent friendliness. The broad, high brow was surmounted by a great lumpy cranium, the crown topped with stiff, black hair, which was tied with Aimee's favourite peach-coloured bandanna.

"Where's Aimee?" he asked.

The alien gave him a look of ineffable condescension.

He edged toward a single chair, apparently left for human guests, and felt angry and stupid.

"Right here, darling. Do you want a beer? We got some this afternoon. You should reimburse Xionjl, do you mind."

The voice made his skin jump nearly clear off his body. It was Aimee.

The sweet yearning he had felt when he heard Aimee's voice over the telephone, however, wasn't there. Iggy dropped into the chair and felt his testes try to crawl into his body.

"Would you like some nice celery sticks?" Aimee wheedled. "We bought human-food this afternoon."

Iggy managed to nod yes.

Xionjl lumbered toward the kitchen, ducking her head under the kitchen ceiling, then fumbling with the refrigerator.

"Maybe I could help?" he asked nervously.

"No!" bellowed the deep, feminine voice. "I mean, it's okay. Relax." The truck-size alien lumbered closer, carrying a plate of crudites in its claw. Iggy shut his eyes. When he opened them, Xionjl reclined on the smelly platform. A Bud Light and a dish of celery, radishes, and carrots sat on a rickety table at his right.

He fumbled for a radish, not trusting himself with the beer. "So," he said, "what's it like being, uh, two people in one?"

"Oh, it's wonderful," said both at once. Iggy jumped. Xionjl's body seemed equipped to sing chords, two voices at once.

Aimee's voice giggled. Xionjl's sexy, somehow feminine bass continued, "All my life I've waited for a chance to incorporate. I practised on non-intelligent creatures."

Iggy felt sick. "You ate cats and rabbits and things?"

"Oh, no, I mean on home-planet. But lower creatures lack coherent memory. I must say, though, I have a froxow in here that gives interesting impressions. Wants to chase froxizes. Of course, it's smarter than an unEaten froxow, because its mind has fused with mine. In time, it will merge with our consciousness."

"Jesus H. Cripes. You mean Aimee is going to fade away? Aimee? You still there?"

Aimee's voice giggled. "After a century or so, Iggy. We'll meld. Fascinating! I wish I could describe it. Seeing through Xionjl's eyes, knowing everything she knows. It's fabulous."

Iggy wrapped his hand around the stem of the beer bottle and took a deep swig, wishing it was vodka.

"Amazing digestive system," he said under his breath.

Xionjl said, "Aimee, darling, tell him what we discussed."

"Oh, no, Xionjl, you tell him."

"He's your mate, not mine."

"Wouldn't Boinx get jealous?"

"Boinx is very open minded. He's proud of me. Do you realize I am the youngest female ever to have Eaten a human?"

"No, darling! Really! I'm proud, honestly proud."

Iggy, listening to this girl-talk, swilled his beer.

What was in the refrigerator, that Xionjl and Aimee had not wanted him in the kitchen? Dead cats? Dead froxows, whatever they were? No, couldn't be. Xionjl had spoken of Eating living creatures.

He stood up casually, stretched his arms, strolled over to the cupboard. Aimee and Xionjl were still arguing over who was going to tell him what.

He opened a cabinet and peered inside. Tiny tins, like caviar. Was this Xionjl's normal fare? Could this have something to do with the gemstones?

"Iggy! Whatever are you doing in that cupboard?"

Iggy shut the cupboard. But he had seen the can labels. "Um. What were you ladies going to proposition me with, anyway?"

Xionjl spoke, mellifluous, low. "We wanted to invite you to come live with us. As Aimee's mate."

"Husband," corrected Aimee. "We're still married. But I really can't go back to the apartment. Too small for our body. Why not come and stay here, Iggy?"

It seemed a reasonable question. Only he kept thinking of what the can label said.

"FELIBARF. FROM PEDIGREED SOURCES. 100% GOURMET CAT VOMIT."

A man needs a wife, as everybody knows. But Iggy's wife had run away to join a travelling freak. He could warm cans of Dinty Moore stew over the stove burner that still worked and hire a teenager to dust the shop. He was not about to move in with the freak to meet those needs. But he still needed a wife. It was a God-given right.

Every town has a whorehouse. Iggy prided himself on not knowing where it was, being as he was a married man and a staunch ex-Knight of Columbus. It took him only an hour to discover the address. Tattered copies of *Chic* failed his needs, and so he sought a hooker who made house calls.

He couldn't visit the house; his car was recognizable, and he wasn't about to walk, not in that neighbourhood.

Aimee and Xionjl, he reasoned, would not stop by the apartment, since Xionjl's body would no way fit through the front door of the shop, and her weight would collapse the staircase to his former love nest. Also, Aimee was not the suspicious type.

Iggy made an appointment Friday night. He showered, clipped his nails, and put on his least worn underwear. Unnecessary to impress a hooker, but then he was a notable citizen of the town, a businessman, with a reputation to uphold. He considered washing what was left of his hair, but decided a damp scalp could weaken his immune system.

So, wearing a fresh polyester shirt and Sans-a-belt slacks, he laid out a row of condoms on the night stand and glanced in the mirror. Inspiration. He trotted down into the shop and slipped a bolo over his head, set with a saurosapiens gem, a green shadow in its misty depths, maybe an octopus or an eye. Perfect touch.

The doorbell rang, shrill as a burglar alarm.

Iggy smoothed his remaining hair. Hell, maybe he should have washed it. Would the hooker like his bolo? Maybe he would offer it to her. Instead of her fee, of course. He strode to the door and threw it open,

freshly-washed privates tingling in anticipation.

"Aimee out of town?" the hooker asked. "She ain't left you, has she?"

"No, no," murmured Iggy, pulling her inside the shop. The hooker had wide hips, and long blonde hair twisted and fastened with a plastic mermaid comb.

"Betcha didn't expect it to be me," said Bettylou.

In the end, Iggy gave Bettylou a credit slip for merchandise and sent her home without getting a thing. Wondering if he could get his money back for the still-wrapped condoms, he undressed. The soapy smell of his body irritated him. He dozed off glaring at the gem in the bolo tie. It gazed back serenely.

The gems weren't selling. Everyone in Sugar Falls who wanted saurosapiens artefacts had already bought them in Chicago or New York or Miami. In fact, nothing was selling. Iggy was going over inventory sheets one afternoon, thinking of excuses not to spend the money to call Desiree for advice, when the phone rang.

"Iggy, great news! Dr Avin Blioblily saw me on TV when Aimee got Eaten, and hired me as his assistant! I'm learning about their culture and the symbionts that transform what they Eat—"

"Who the hell is Dr Avin Blioblily?"

"Oh! I thought sure you'd have heard of him! A prominent specialist in alien studies."

Iggy, bored, began to fill out a quarterly withholding form for the IRS. "Strange name."

"Oh, no. A very common name among the saurosapiens. He's an expert on humans. He says I can get information that they would be reticent to give him personally."

"Turncoat," muttered Iggy.

"Anyway, I really called to find out where my sister is."

"Still in the belly of the whale, far as I know."

She paused, coyly. "Well, have you seen her?"

He glowered at the phone, as if to give her a dirty look long distance. "What do you mean, seen? You mean did I screw her?"

"Well —"

"Are you crazy? I mean, a man gets used to things, varicose veins, that ripply fat you bitches get on your butts —"

"Men get cellulite too!"

"So what! She turned into a goddamn tyrannosaurus. I'm supposed to get hard over a giant kangaroo that eats cat barf?"

"Calm down, Iggy. You needn't make love to her if you don't want."

Yeah, thought Iggy. So what am I supposed to do? Check into a monastery? Pay Bettylou hush-money to screw me and not tell everybody in town? And pay her with free samples from the still-unpaid-for saurosapiens shipment?

"Would you like me to come help you straighten things out?" Desiree could sound so sweet. What would happen if he made a pass at Desiree? He decided not to find out.

"No," he said shortly. "Things are already straight."

Aimee called next morning.

"Iggy, is that you? Xionjl can't figure out how to



change the fuse for the front floodlight. Are you busy? You haven't opened the shop yet, have you?"

"Why the hell doesn't Xionjl go wake up Betsy? It's his rental apartment, and his goddamn floodlight."

"Iggy, have you had breakfast? Why don't you pick up a bag of doughnuts and come on over."

"I hate doughnuts."

"You didn't hate doughnuts that time I hung two of them on your schlong and then ate them off you."

Iggy sat down on the bed. "It really is you, isn't it? Not the alien doing some clever imitation."

Xionjl's cow-elephant rumble came on. "Aimee said you might suspect that."

"Christ, Aimee! Is Xionjl listening to all this?"

"Well, I can hardly ask her to leave."

"Yes, but —"

"I remember I had to ream a bigger hole in the doughnuts. Or did we go with the jelly kind and I just jammed them on?"

Iggy passed a hand over his scalp. "They were jelly doughnuts. Raspberry."

"Ooo, I remember now. You licked them off my face afterward. Wasn't that fun? Have you had breakfast?"

"Aimee, there are strangers present."

"Remember the time we tried the same thing with bagels? That didn't work, but remember what you did with the lox?"

"Listen, woman, is Xionjl in heat or something? Because —"

Xionjl's voice: "I beg your pardon?"

"Damn it, I'm having a private conversation with my —"

"Anyway, if you don't want doughnuts for breakfast, how about bringing over some strawberries and a tub of Cool Whip?"

Iggy considered. It had entered his mind that a man could make it with an alien. Not that he would, of course. But maybe phone sex, or —

NO!

Change the subject. "You said Xionjl maybe could get me a deal on saurosapiens gems. I about signed my life away for this box I've got, and I haven't sold one yet."

"Anybody been in to look at them?" Aimee asked sweetly.

Shit. In his horny depression, he had taken the closed sign down only two days this week. How could he stay open when Aimee —

"Because, Iggy, if you haven't been pushing them, how do you plan to pay for them?"

"The sexagenarian honeymooners are gonna buy them." But Iggy knew they would only sell if he kept the store open. "Look, ladies, I've got to open the store. I can't do breakfast with you. Another time."

Xionjl's honey-sweet rumble. "Iggy, Aimee misses you. You sell some gems today, and come over tonight. We'll order pizza."

"I don't like pizza. Pizza costs money."

Aimee's voice again. "Darling, anything you say. But I want to see you, baby. I miss your lover-man ways."

Aw, shit. Iggy hung up and limped downstairs to open shop.

The gems were a big hit with kids, but too expensive. One confused customer was persuaded to get

one for his ten-year-old's birthday. His wife made him bring it back next day.

That night, Aimee called to wheedle again. Iggy was tempted, until he thought about Xionjl. As an excuse, he said Xionjl's raunchy scent put him off. Aimee said Xionjl would be glad to shower in the local car wash.

So he found himself, at eight, in Betsy's barn. He was dressed resplendently: Sans-a-belt trousers, nylon no-iron shirt, and the saurosapiens gem bolo tie with the eye/octopus inside it.

Xionjl and Aimee provided a romantic mood: candles, beer, dip, pizza (paid for by Xionjl). Iggy, however, was cross. He had not sold anything all day except some comic books that he later realized he had priced too low. He had made a light dinner on the free smoked sausage samples at Giant Eagle.

"Do try some of this." Xionjl suggested, plunking two large brown capsules in front of him. "It will help you relax."

Iggy pried one capsule open. It contained a brown vinegary substance like mulch, mixed with cat hairs. "What is it?"

Aimee's voice was the auditory analogue of a cat presenting its arse to be sniffed. "A saurosapiens product, dear. To heighten the senses. Certain senses. You'll enjoy it, really."

Iggy dropped the capsule on the table. "No, thanks. My senses are very heightened as it is."

Xionjl reclined on the repulsive bed, the scent of which was somewhat diminished. Now the smell resembled a type of crab tree bloom the odour of which is between blossom and rotten meat. With ponderous sensuality, Xionjl got up to serve the pizza.

Iggy strained to see what she did to it, but it seemed okay.

No cat hairs.

It did, however, have that vinegar taste.

Illusion, he decided. The samples at Giant Eagle had been small, and the lady had glared when he came back the fifth time.

"Would you two care for a game of cards?" asked Xionjl. Iggy looked around, then realized she was addressing Aimee and himself.

Xionjl smiled coyly, a shark-like leer. "You think Aimee and I will cheat. That I'll let her know what's in my hand."

Aimee's voice lilted, "Trust us, sweet man."

They played Canasta, a game the saurosapiens adored. By the third round, Iggy had mentally undressed the Queen of Hearts and was fantasizing sodomy on the Jack of Clubs. He inhaled Xionjl's meat-flower smell with barely restrained lust.

Passion on a short leash, he raised his gaze to Xionjl's purple-violet eyes.

They were enormous. Expressive. Deep. When he moved, his erection vibrated like a tuning fork.

"My darling," said Aimee, her voice thick with emotion.

He laid the cards down and leaned toward her, inhaling her heady scent. His eyes closed, and he —

"NO!" He recoiled. "Goddamn conniving bitches! What did you put it in? The pizza? Shit, in that goddamn incense?"

"Calm down," soothed Aimee. "Have some dip." Xionjl leaned massively forward and nudged the chips toward him. Aimee purred, "Just a preparation the saurosapiens are test-marketing."

Iggy was trembling. The erotic haze confused his vision, but he fought it like a man. "You can't test-market something without FDA approval."

Xionjl tossed her head and leered in a parody of Aimee's knowing smile. "But it *has* FDA approval. We just aren't sure it's economical to market it here. Americans are so suspicious."

Aimee added, "Look, Iggy, if you must know, we dipped the anchovies in it. You always order anchovies. You've had a full dose, so you might as well enjoy it."

"Enjoy it? You scheming sluts –" but his perspective shifted, and he gazed with wonder on Xionjl's ripe, rippling flesh, the sensitive muscles of her jaw, the sweet corpulent thighs in which a man might bury himself.

Moments later, he found himself naked, tripping over his shorts, which were wrapped around his ankles. His penis, like a divining rod, pointed at Xionjl's opulent sexuality.

He leapt on her, and she caught him in her forepaws. Ah, he thought, those little claws look weak, but she cradles me like a froxow with his first froxilon.

Whatever the hell a froxow is.

He ignored the huge crack of mouth and concentrated on Xionjl's large, expressive eyes, which shaded from delicate lilac to a deep royal which reminded him of a great organ chord.

Inside he sang hosannas to the drug. He was erect, rigidly, weepingly erect.

He scrambled down her body, to her magnificent cleft.

It was like plunging into an immense bowl of warm dough – no definition, just warmth and silky-sticky smoothness. What kind of male organ must suit this huge hot sex-pudding? Bigger? Yes! If only his were bigger – say about two feet long and thick as a man's thigh – then he might feel something, some constriction, some –

And abruptly, he was flaccid.

"What's wrong, darling?" asked two female voices in harmony.

Iggy couldn't sort out all the wrongness. "This is crazy. You're not my wife. You're a goddamn hairy lizard, a komodo dragon with a West Virginia twang." He slid to the floor and, hunkered on his heels, yelled, "I want my wife!"

"Are we not attractive enough?" chorused Xionjl and Aimee.

He focused on Xionjl's expression of combined solicitude and blood-lust. "You drugged me!"

Xionjl's eyes widened with pain. A tiny wail – Aimee's – escaped her lips, and she spun away, knocking him down. She stampeded to the loft and heaved herself up the ladder.

The bathroom in the suite was in the loft itself, a stratagem to comply with some obscure plumbing

code. The two must have gone into the bathroom. Iggy shakily gathered his clothes. Home. He was going home.

Soft sobbing from the loft.

Actually, he was curious how Xionjl could fit herself into the loft, let alone the bathroom.

Smashing, bashing noises, then the groan of torn metal.

Cautiously, he mounted the ladder.

Aimee's voice: "Men are all alike! The best of them will destroy a beautiful relationship."

And Xionjl's bass: "Boinx isn't like that. He's kind. It's just human men!"

"Stop that!" yelled Iggy.

The bathroom door opened a crack, revealing an enormous violet eye. "Boinx would never reject me because of my looks. He married me for my soul."

"Bullshit! If you were trapped in the body of, of, of –"

"Of a human?" insinuated Xionjl.

"No! worse than that! A giant earthworm with hairballs and breath like sulphur. And no tits!"

Xionjl slammed the door. "He says he wants tits, Aimee."

Aimee wailed, "I used to have beautiful tits! That's all he really wanted me for!"

"You bitch!" screamed Iggy. "That's not true!" He looked around the loft floor, strewn with pizza boxes, empty cans, candy wrappers, and a dead squirrel. Also, huge clothing. Did Xionjl wear clothes? Come to think, the saurosapiens on TV sometimes affected human clothing. He scuffled through a heap of laundry. A bra. Hippo-sized. With six cups. He did not remember seeing tits on Xionjl. A seasonal thing? Maybe they only appeared when she was pregnant, or when Boinx turned up?

Somehow it seemed the wrong time to ask.

He wanted to lie down. He was very tired, and very horny.

Might as well get it over with.

"Aimee," he called softly. "Don't be a fool. I just need to get used to this all. It's so – new."

The door opened a crack and Xionjl gazed out, expectancy and love in her huge face. "Persuade us," said Aimee's voice.

At four A.M., the two females finished with Iggy. He passed out on Xionjl's bed, overcome with perverse satiety.

Was it dawn, seeping under the door, that woke him? Or his bolo tie lying under him, the prongs on the braided strap piercing his hip? Or the overwhelming sexual stench?

Xionjl lay sleeping beside him, one forepaw possessively around his waist, a claw gouging his belly. He tried to move her arm, gave up, squirmed underneath it, and sat, legs dangling over the side of the platform. It was over four feet high; had he vaulted up in his enthusiasm, or had Xionjl lifted him?

Christ. Mingled with the pain from the bolo stabbing his thigh, he felt tremendous thirst, blended with mounting nausea.

He also had to urinate, a lot. He hopped down and pulled his pants on. Gritting his teeth, he dragged

himself up the ladder to the loft, bladder protesting every step. At the top, he lay staring over the edge, wondering if he had the strength to get to the bathroom, or whether he was going to let go onto the floor some 20 feet below.

In the bathroom, he braced himself against the wall over the toilet and enjoyed relief almost sufficient to make him forget about vomiting. His body stank of Xionjl. The shower-head had been broken off during the females' tantrum the previous night, but at least he could sponge off. He stepped out of his sticky trousers and flicked on the light to look for soap and a towel.

Then he noticed that his entire groin was stuccoed with green phlegm.

He shrieked. His pubic hair was caked with it, it ran down his legs, and worst of all, his penis was a putrescent olive drab.

"Oh, darling! What's wrong?" It was Aimee's voice.

"Green goo! I've turned all green!"

The two voices whispered a panicky exchange. Then: "Xionjl says that's just lubricant. She secretes a green lubricant."

Iggy turned on the faucet full blast and bent over the basin to wash himself under the water. It scalded him, and he jumped back, yelping. He moistened the towel and scrubbed at himself.

"It isn't coming off! It's like indelible snot!"

Aimee's sweet, patient voice: "Xionjl says there's a trick to it. Just come on down."

Iggy eyed his trousers, stained with green mucus. The mucus was what stank. He slung the wet towel over his shoulder and repressed a wave of nausea. Could he negotiate that ladder again?

"Shall we come up and get you, dear?"

Iggy leaned against the wall. Eyes closed, he felt the room wheel around. Get a grip, he thought. Must have been the stuff in the pizza. Vertigo conquered, he managed to descend into the living room.

"Oooo," cooed the women simultaneously.

"This aphrodisiac junk isn't going to be too popular if it leaves a hangover like this," he growled.

Xionjl patted his head clumsily, and Aimee's voice said, "Actually, it wasn't the bbrexinin."

"Well, if it wasn't the bbr – the whatever – what was it?"

Xionjl's mouth stretched into a solicitous smile. "Upsadaisy," said Aimee's voice. Then, Xionjl's bass, "Let's get you onto the bed and take a look."

He allowed himself to be lifted onto the nauseating sleeping platform, afraid he would puke. But so what? It might improve the smell. "What causes the hangover, if not the drug?"

"Oh," said Xionjl. "Well, uh, that's part of our mating cycle. We're a very oral species, and we throw up after sex."

Iggy screamed loudly.

"Hold still. I'm trying to get the stuff out of your navel."

Iggy moaned softly, hopelessly. "Never again, never."

"Iggums! Didn't you enjoy it?"

Iggy considered. Curiously, he did remember hav-

ing fun, like the survivor of a very bad drunken party.

Somewhere, a door whooshed open and daylight streamed in. Aimee going out for coffee, he thought.

But Xionjl was standing over him with a wad of toilet paper and a wet towel. And Aimee was not going anywhere without Xionjl. But it was Aimee! Aimee of the beautiful, droopy tits and apricot-dyed hair, removing gloves and a plastic rain-bonnet –

"Hellooo, Iggy," simpered Desiree. "Xionjl, dear, how's my sister? Aimee? You in there?"

Iggy looked around wildly for something to cover his crotch. He snatched at the towel, but Xionjl playfully held it out of reach. He jerked his knees to his chest and hid his genitalia between his ankles.

"Iggy! I'm sorry! Did I interrupt something?"

She turned to go, but the door filled with a gigantic form.

"WHERE'S MY WIFE?" bellowed a voice like a jet plane.

"Oooh." Desiree shrank to one side and crushed her gloves and rain hood between her breasts. "I brought a friend."

The creature in the door was almost twice the size of Xionjl. Beside it, Xionjl looked feminine. Dainty. The creature's breath billowed across the room; Iggy smelled it and felt its warmth.

Desiree minced forward. "This is Boinx. He's Xionjl's–"

"It's not what you think!" bellowed Xionjl. She tossed Iggy aside and lumbered forward toward the gigantic thing Desiree called Boinx. "I was just applying a little um first aid to um –"

"YOU'RE MY WIFE, YOU AINX'L TRIX! LIL-TROIX VUNJEEM BLOTL!" Boinx cuffed Xionjl, knocking her across the room. She fell backward, crushing Iggy beneath her.

The two aliens screamed at each other in words Iggy did not even want to understand. He tried to squirm from under Xionjl's hot weight. To his relief, Boinx sprang forward and, cursing loudly (Iggy guessed), grabbed Xionjl from the bed and threw her to the floor. Iggy, naked, scrambled toward the edge.

And found himself hanging by his neck from one of Boinx's sharp-nailed forepaws.

Boinx had him by the scruff, by muscles and skin on the back of his neck, as if Iggy were a kitten. The saurosapiens lifted him to eye level, and Iggy saw that Boinx had to stoop to avoid hitting the ceiling. Iggy dangled at a level above the loft.

"ARX L'NL, VEEBRET VOIDL TRIX! LA VOTL XI HOX MOXL!"

Iggy had been holding his breath too long. He breathed outward, then inward, preparing to scream.

The stench of Boinx's breath hit him full force.

He vomited explosively, drenching himself and Boinx.

"ROIX PLITL PLATL! VOIDL! XI ARX MOXL'L!" said Boinx.

"No! Don't!" screamed Desiree, from far below. "He's too old! It's no honour with such a scrawny old man!"

Boinx released Iggy, who braced himself to die of a broken neck. Instead, he landed on the sleeping platform.

Desiree scurried over to him. "Now he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that you've seduced his mate."

Iggy, naked and bruised, lolled in pain on the platform. "Because of the green slimy stuff?"

Her gaze flicked to his crotch, and she closed her eyes modestly. "Well, that was his first clue. But when you threw up all over him, that cinched it!"

"Desiree, help me!"

"I can't. In a challenge, you have to fight all by yourself."

"A challenge! Are you out of your mind?"

She compressed her lips and nodded grimly.

Boinx was watching him.

Iggy grabbed his pants and leapt off the platform. His ankle twisted as he landed, but he scarcely felt it.

Boinx loomed between him and the exit, raving in Saurosapiens.

Trousers clutched to his chest, Iggy sprinted for the kitchen. A place to hide! Refrigerator? Oven? No, no! Boinx could turn that on!

Closet? There wasn't one. Trash compactor? No!

Under the sink!

Boinx's footsteps thundered nearer. Frantic, he threw drain cleaner and scouring powder onto the kitchen floor and thrust head and shoulders under the sink. The opening scraped his naked back cruelly as he jammed his body in. The cabinet door swung shut.

He fit! All those years of being skinny, Aimee making fun of how his ribs showed – now it paid off!

The door opened and light streamed in. Sharp claws grabbed his ankle and hauled him out onto the cold floor.

Boinx's head loomed over him. The alien could squeeze only head and arm into the kitchen alcove, but he roared, "Trix'roind! coward! Have human males less valour than your mates?"

Yes, oh yes! mouthed Iggy, tongue too dry to squeak.

"Into the open! I will not Eat a man who refuses to fight!"

Good, oh good! thought Iggy.

"And you will fight!" A leathery hand, with long, sharp nails on eight fingers slithered around Iggy's ankle and clamped down.

It yanked.

Iggy came out of the cupboard like a babe a-borning, screaming and naked. His head banged against the sill of the cupboard, raking cheek and ear. Dragged over the kitchen floor, he left a streak of blood from a torn ear-lobe.

Boinx held him dangling by one leg, upside down, hip straining in its socket. Blood drained to his head. Roaring in his ears. He realized the roaring was his own voice screaming.

"Help me, for God's sake! Desiree! Aimeeeee?"

Desiree, looking upside down, pressed her hands together in horror. "Oh no! A challenge. Boinx, no! He's too old and frail!"

A spark of fury ignited Iggy's heart and he swiped at Boinx's immense snout. The saurosapiens merely opened his maw, as if inviting Iggy in. Boinx's breath made Iggy's eyes water. His belly contracted, but



nausea faded with terror. And anger.

"Put me down, you yellow-bellied stink-bug, you!"

Boinx dangled Iggy closer to his huge, evil, grinning mouth.

Iggy punched him in the nose.

The punch did little damage to Boinx – made him blink – but it set Iggy swinging. His hip joint twisted, agonizingly.

"Iggy, don't enrage him!" Aimee said. "It may be better if –"

Xionjl finished, "– if you just let him Eat you. It'll be over in a second. He could just snap your neck and –"

"Don't say such a thing!" screamed Desiree.

To die. To sleep no more: Boinx doth murder sleep, thought Iggy. Where the hell was that from?

Boinx slid sharp claws under Iggy's naked buttock and rolled him onto his forearm, as if Iggy were a cat. "Let's step outside," Boinx rumbled. "We'll do this in public."

Desiree shrieked, "NO!" Then, stepping back and looking up appeasingly at Boinx, she said, "Let me call the newspaper and the TV station. A good audience."

"Of all humans?" Boinx shifted his weight from foot to foot, considering. "I'd prefer something dignified. A small group."

Boinx's grip relaxed and he swayed ruminatively, making Iggy dizzy and banging his head on the loft ladder.

Iggy grabbed the ladder rung and hung on for dear life.

Like swinging from monkey bars as a kid. Or hanging from the branch of a tree. Back then, he could support his weight easily.

Now, he was too weak.

Boinx pulled at him, annoyed. The ladder rung scraped Iggy's hands. Did the loft have a window? Maybe he could get loose, scramble into the loft, jump out, and escape. Naked. Why not?

Better than being Eaten, in a challenge!

Boinx pulled, snorting in irritation.

Iggy clung to the ladder.

Just as his arms were ready to fall off, Xionjl (he assumed it was Xionjl; she was on Boinx's side) gave the loft a shake. Iggy lost his grip; Boinx's hands, slippery with sweat, slid off Iggy's ankles.

And he was plummeting.

He twisted in the air, and landed on the bed.

The bed was hard. Iggy lay unable to breath, the wind knocked out of him.

Something gouged him in the ribs. Warm, wet blood oozed between his side and the bed. His stupid bolo tie. He grabbed it and rolled out of Boinx's reach. The alien dipped a claw in the blood and tasted, eyes closed to savour it.

"A feisty one! You should be interesting to incorporate," Boinx said, smacking his enormous narrow lips.

He reached for Iggy.

In utter panic, Iggy threw the braided leather cord of the bolo toward Boinx's face. If only he could get it around Boinx's throat, and strangle him!

But no. The cord snagged on his huge snout. Iggy pulled on it, then tied the ends in a knot, as Boinx tried to claw it away. Iggy needed another weapon.

All he could see was the mucus-soaked towel Xionjl had cleaned him with. He grabbed it and thrust it in Boinx's face.

Boinx's eyes opened wide, big as turkey platters. He gagged.

Iggy scrambled back. The saurosapiens looked cross-eyed, down at his own snout. He gagged more, clawing at the bolo cord. He couldn't get his mouth open!

"What's happening?" Desiree asked.

Boinx fell thunderously onto his side, banging his head on the bed. Iggy leaped over and jammed the towel into Boinx's nostrils. Boinx's great abdomen heaved convulsively.

"He's choking!" Iggy screamed triumphantly.

Xionjl bellowed, "Save him!" She grabbed at the bolo cord. It came loose, but Boinx went on choking. She pounded his back, and Aimee screamed "Heimlich manoeuvre! Heimlich manoeuvre!"

Xionjl was too hysterical to let Aimee take over her body. And Xionjl seemed not to know the Heimlich manoeuvre, if indeed it would work on a saurosapiens.

"Call an ambulance!" screamed Aimee's voice.

Desiree edged toward the telephone, but Boinx lay, a mountain of meat, limp, forepaws pointing straight up, legs splayed.

Iggy heaved a deep breath and slid off the bed. "He's dead. Vomited when I stuck that towel in his face, then choked on it."

Xionjl let out a deafening wail.

"Hello, fire department?" Desiree screamed into the phone. "This is an emergency. Send a rescue squad! We have a choking victim. Betsy's, the honeymoon suite. Oh, thank God! Hurry!"

Iggy foraged for his clothes. As he dressed, he shook his head. "Damn fool. Can't beat a wily antique dealer."

Xionjl sobbed, her voice mingling with Aimee's comforting coos.

"He's dead," said Desiree. "The rescue squad is coming, but he's dead!"

"I suppose I'm in trouble," Iggy said. "Manslaughter? Or is there a special law for killing aliens?"

"Oh, no," said Desiree. "This was a challenge."

Iggy started to get worried. "I've got you two as witnesses. You think I'll have to go to trial? Crap. What a mess."

Sirens. Screech of tires outside. Two medics burst in, carrying bags and stethoscopes.

The buxom blonde medic, whose badge said *Bendix*, gaped at the mountainous corpse. "My God, lady, you didn't say it was an alien!"

"Does it make a difference?" asked Desiree.

Xionjl made a pitiful, grieving mewl.

The male medic shook his head and walked over to Boinx's head. He felt the neck. "These guys have hearts just like us. Can't do without oxygen as long as we can, though. Bigger brains." He stepped back. "Not much we can do. Even if we started his heart up again –"

"Please try!" wailed Xionjl.

The two medics began working on the alien. Bendix climbed onto the body to inject Boinx's chest. After a few moments, they looked at each other and shook their heads. Bendix spoke again. "We need a flatbed



Some Americas, and a Dane

Paul J. McAuley

In an early interview, the young Elvis Costello creepily revealed that he kept a little black book in which he noted down the names of everyone who had crossed him, and that he also carried a large, bent, steel nail just in case anyone got in his way. I don't know about the nail, but one can well imagine that Bruce Bethke had a little black book open beside him while writing *Headcrash* (Orbit, £5.99). For *Headcrash* gleefully lays into all those who have taken computer technology in vain, and Bethke has a good motive for this slaughter of the idols: he coined a word which profited him not at all but became the label for the hot and hip movement (or as Bruce Sterling had it, *The Movement*) of the 1980s. We are talking, of course, about cyberpunk, first used in Bethke's 1983 short story "Cyberpunk" and appropriated by Gardner Dozois as a cognomen for the posse of young gunslingers who were attempting to subvert sf from the inside, a trend in which Bethke was conspicuous by his absence.

Revenge, no matter how entertainingly dished up, cannot by itself sustain a novel. But Bethke is a technical writer and software developer whose demolition job on the technological illiteracy of many recently invented sf tropes is performed not only done with pinpoint accuracy, but also with an informed and pointed wit. Like much cyberpunk, *Headcrash* is set in a wired-up near future in which smart, hungry young hackers try and steal a living in the shadow of the mainframes and networks of the lumbering corporate dinosaurs which own the world, but it is a sharp parody of the romantic cyberpunk notion that hackers are cowboys of the new frontier, or clear-eyed Indian scouts of the cybernetic badlands. Here, everyone is a victim or dupe, most of all the novel's narrator, Jack Burroughs, the lowliest of the software engineers who maintain the computer network of a minor division of Monolithic Diversified Enterprises. Burroughs, so socially inept that his idea of entertaining a hot date is to play four hours' worth of Weird Al Jankovitch tapes, has as a cybernetic *alter ego* a majorly cool denizen (or so he fondly imagines) of a virtual reality nightclub. In this, he's an echo of the dichotomous Hiero Protagonist in Neil Stephenson's *Snowcrash* – but while Hiero really was a true adept, the heart of *Headcrash*'s comedy is that Jack Burroughs may think that he's cool, but of course he isn't. When a mysterious woman offers his cybernetic *alter ego* a million dollars to crack the computer net of a megaselling author and steal the files of his next book, his sleuthing sets in motion a slow stripping of layers to reveal the conspiracy at the heart of the world, in which Burroughs turns out to be no more than a stooge.



The real fun of *Headcrash* lies not in the plot, with its heightened parody of cyberpunkish paranoia and requirement that all the players rip off unconvincing masks at its denouement, but in Burroughs's self-deprecating descriptions of his own pratfalls. Bethke is as unsparing with his cybergeek hero – who characterizes himself as a bright sociopath possessed of arcane knowledge but no power – as with the soulless corporations which seek to turn its employees into obedient automatons. Like Douglas Coupland, Bethke excels in the Newspeak of late 20th-century

capitalism; in one of the best and funniest sequences in the book, the extended ritual humiliation by which Burroughs is stripped of his corporate identity, he's told that being fired is not a problem but an opportunity, and anyway he hasn't been fired but transitioned to Unpaid Administrative Leave.

That this occurs fairly early on in the novel does weaken it; Burroughs's adventures as a cyberspace cowboy, hacking through information space with the aid of a ProctoProd (don't ask) interface and a virtual reality rig which resembles the costume of Frank N. Furter, lose a dimension when no longer measured against his life as a hapless corporate drone. The torrid romance of his business partner does not provide so strong a foil; the virtual reality playground slowly gains the frictionless glamour of too many other VR novels; and the *deus ex machina* resolution depends upon a device which was ruthlessly disparaged earlier in the novel. Yet *Headcrash*, fast and funny and blackly cynical, informed by a narrator who sees through everything but his own self, is wickedly accurate in its scourging debunking of the more unlikely notions of cyberpunk. It is an arcade game that plays its own self, and racks up a pretty good score.

It is good to be reminded that there are works of fantasy which inhabit literary spaces other than the valley of the shadow of the triple-decker heroic quest to save the bosky dell of the hairy-footed sons of the earth from pollution. Here are three fine individual voices from places ranging from sixth-century Scandinavia, the last hundred years of Pacific North West history, and a contemporary America interpenetrated by a fiction.

In *The Tower of Beowulf* (Morrow, \$23.00), Parke Godwin uses the classic Norse myth to examine the psychopathology of the Hero, focusing as much on Beowulf's yearning for ordinary relationships with ordinary people as on his exploits. It is divided into three parts: an ignominious defeat, in which Beowulf, saved by a Christian priest, is the only survivor of an ill-thought-out adolescent raid; his victory over the monster Grendel, and Grendel's even more monstrous mother; and his final adventure against a dragon awakened in defence of its hidden hoard. Rather than the grim and relentless nemesis of John Gardner's *Grendel*, Parke Godwin is interested in discovering the human being within the armour of the hero, and from the Christianized version of the myth he excavates the sensibilities of the sixth-century pagans in a spare yet vivid narrative in which the capricious gods and the monsters they spawn are mingled with an unforced realism.

Godwin's Beowulf is a tragic figure

BOOKS



REVIEWED

in the classical mode, driven and self-doubting, haunted by the shame of his early defeat and wearing his fame and his subsequent responsibility uneasily. His heroic deeds may be a kind of escape from human responsibility, but that escape is only temporary and may bear too costly a price. It is a lesson overlooked by too many jejune evocations of the hero in commercial fantasy blockbusters, conveyed in a finely crafted and insightful narrative. It is wise. It is good.

In *The Off Season* (St Martin's Press, \$23.95), Jack Cady conflates a tale of small-town scandal into a literal apocalypse. Point Vestal, a synthesis of Twin Peaks, Innsmouth, and Cicely, Alaska, is a town where "all the time is happening some of the time," built on a part of the coast of the Pacific North West so cursed that the Indians were actually glad to give it away to the white man. Its population inhabits a dozen different eras simultaneously, doors open into the past, the old Parsonage appears in different parts of the town, and suffering appears eternal. Every Wednesday, at 4.00 pm precisely, the same sailor is beaten to death in the cellar of the City Hall; every Christmas Eve the same child falls into a fireplace; twins take turns to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff.

An itinerant preacher, Joel-Andrews, vows to try and change things. In his innocence, Joel-Andrews allows mad August Starling to finally return to the house where in 1893 he was found dancing with a dead woman not his wife, and triggers a struggle for the collective soul of the town as Starling absorbs the worst excesses of the 20th century and promises eternal life for any who will follow him. It's a tall tale told with impressive fluency and attention to the verisimilitude of the well-rounded characters which throng its pages. There's a steely control underlying Cady's seemingly whimsical invention, and he marshals his large cast with impressive ease in a twisty plot that unexpectedly reveals that the tale, narrated by a cabal of townspeople, is darker than it first appears. Losing its past, Point Vestal loses its own self, and Cady observes the tensions of its small town community with a cool irony.

William Browning Spencer's *Zod Wallop* (St Martin's Press, \$21.95) is a book about a book which is also called *Zod Wallop*, a bestselling children's fantasy written by Harry Gainesborough after his daughter accidentally drowned. But the bestselling book was preceded by a darker version which Harry suppressed, and now that the book seems to be seeping into real life he urgently needs to discover which version is winning out.

Harry wrote *Zod Wallop* while he was

in therapy with a group of institutionalized mentally-disturbed people who were receiving an experimental drug which materializes fantasies. Led by Raymond Story, who believes that the narrative of the world has somewhere taken a wrong turning and requires correction, the patients escape from the institution and reappear in Harry's life, playing the roles of characters in his book amidst sinister manifestations of its fantasy world. Harry finds that he alone has the key to resolve the unwinding plot, and perhaps to revive his dead daughter; meanwhile, two different sets of villains are in pursuit of the patients because the drug's inventor destroyed his research before killing himself, and the last traces of the drug can be found only in the patients' blood.

Zod Wallop is a delightful picaresque which along the way has some wise things to say about the responsibility of authorship, and the relative power of author and reader. Harry is a helpless and ineffective god pushed along by the characters assumed by Raymond Story and his followers; Harry's only real power being that of choosing the ending. Spencer has a good eye for the absurd, and like Cady there's a dark edge to his comic invention. The body-count steadily increases, and there's a genuinely spooky evocation of a gas station shop in which Harry's memories of his dead daughter are transformed into shelves full of tacky mass-produced souvenirs. The final pell-mell confrontation may be confused by Spencer's insistence on including every one of his plethora of characters (surely one villain would be enough, given the casual way the other is dispatched), but the pay-off, when we are finally allowed to realize which version of the text we have been reading, is genuinely earned.

Like many hi-tech thrillers, Mark Canter's *Ember from the Sun* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99), seeks to depict the triumph of humanism over the soulless empiricism of science; and like Michael Crichton, Mark Canter (hmm, those initials) plays on unease about the hubristic powers of biomedical technology. But while *Ember from the Sun* starts out as a tale of an arrogant scientist brought low by his own creation (or as Brian Aldiss pithily has it, hubris clobbered

by nemesis), it undergoes a sea-change informed by a deep sympathy with the estrangement of its eponymous heroine, a Neanderthal girl born into the end of the 20th century.

The scientist is Yute Nahadeh, an Alaskan Native American who discovers the frozen corpse of a Neanderthal woman which contains a viable embryo. Nahadeh, swollen with heady visions of Nobel prizes, transplants the embryo into the womb of a surrogate mother, but she and her boyfriend flee with baby Ember, bringing her up in their own Native American community. Canter's portrayal of this Neanderthal orphan, not as a shambling brute but a golden-skinned child of nature with heightened hearing, sight and sense of smell, and an acute affinity with wild animals, is romantic yet convincing. Canter is at his



Photo: Ken Durnine

Jack Cady, author of *The Off Season*

best when playing the values of different cultures against each other, and his deft portrayal of Native Americans struggling to preserve their heritage on the fringes of Western consumerism nicely mirrors Ember's voyage of discovery of her own inheritance. But Ember's personal dilemma and Nahadeh's attempts to win back his prize specimen are swiftly overshadowed by the threat of a faceless mining corporation to not only despoil Nahadeh's Alaskan homeland, but also to destroy Ember's people, who put themselves into a kind of holistic cryonic suspension to escape genocide. The narrative, sustained by visions which conveniently explain away all the plot's loose ends, collapses into a race against time in a locked cavern which will no doubt look great in the movie but simultaneously coarsens and sugar-coats an otherwise sympathetic portrayal of a rite of passage of someone cruelly displaced from her own culture. Hubris clobbered by nemesis indeed. **Paul J. McAuley**



What better to motivate a true patriot than the reflection that the enemies of his country are the enemies of God also? Dennis Wheatley extended this winning formula to include his own enemies in both categories, and the rest is history. Wheatley had a superb sense of place, a debatable perception of social nuance, and a leaden ear for dialogue; Barbara Hambly, in *Travelling with the Dead* (Voyager, £4.99; Del Rey, \$22) matches his perception of place with her own sense of period, and while her dialogue isn't her best point, it's not embarrassing either.

The story is set in 1908, and concerns the endeavours of the English ex-spy Dr (of philology) David Asher and his wife Dr (of medicine) Lydia to frustrate the dastardly attempts of the Austro-Hungarian agent Karolyi to – do what, exactly? Something hurtful to the British Empire, no doubt, but he isn't telling and nor is the known vampire (the first of many?) whom he has enlisted as an ally. On the other hand, the loyalty of vampires is dearly bought and easily lost; the Ashers have on their team Ysidro (a 16th-century Spaniard), and once David feels it necessary to involve himself, Lydia is soon in pursuit, accompanied by Ysidro and an ex-governess whom he (having old-fashioned views about ladies travelling unaccompanied) has ensorcelled to act as chaperone. The chase leads from Edwardian London to Constantinople in the first winter of the Young Turks, taking in Paris and Vienna *en route*, which allows Hambly to reinforce the lushly romantic atmosphere with authentic-sounding period detail. Did you know that Novocaine was available in Constantinople in 1908? I didn't, I checked, it was.

Everyone in the book constantly alternates between pursuer and pursued, the undead being vulnerable by day, the living by night, so it's not surprising that chronic lack of sleep afflicts all parties. This is a traditional thriller, full of hair's-breadth escapes, captures and recaptures, much assorted mayhem (succeeded by moments of angst at the wasteful squalour of it all) and the usual imperative to keep the terrible truth from the common people for whose benefit the whole caper is being cut. It works, pretty well, less from any philosophical depth than because the characters are broadly but skilfully drawn, the writing is atmospheric and the sense of difference which vampirism entails is realised far better than usual.

As the book progresses the international intrigue recedes and the emotional conflicts between undead and the living on all sides (and there are many parties involved) come to dominate, adding interest but giving the impression that Hambly has not so much lost her direction as found another she likes

Ripping Yarns and Small-town Sagas

Chris Gilmore

better. This leads to a multiplicity of new characters entering fairly late, and requires her to make rather intrusive use of flashback, but in general I'm happy to go along; her writing about the subtle deformation of human emotions under the impact of an unnatural existence extending over centuries has real conviction. But in one area no writer quite succeeds in suspending disbelief, and most (including Hambly) don't try. That is what one might call the background body-count. If as many as ten vampires inhabit a city of a million people, of whom they each consume 2.5 in the average week, that's 25 bodies or disappearances to be accounted for – 1300 a year. By extension, at current rates vampires must be responsible for somewhat over half of all deaths from all causes (using current UK demographics; earlier epochs and less happy nations would yield a lower proportion). The Carpathians were never like this – even the satanic Countess Erszebet Bathory is only reckoned to have done for 650 – and nor was New York. Who's going to come up with a really convincing explanation of why we never seem to notice?

The chronology to Mercedes Lackey's *Storm Warning* (Millennium, £4.99) lists 18 books, of which at least three have yet to be published, and may still be in the pre-planning stage. The parallel with Heinlein's chronology, with its own stories-to-be-told by way of hostages to fortune, is obvious, and suggests that Lackey invites comparison. Unfortunately comparison calls to mind Heinlein's "seniles" quite as much as the books of his best period, and opens certain questions about the legitimacy of fantasy as a literary form.

Lackey has a good opening, with a strong, simple situation. The Emperor

Charliss, Adept mage and ruler of a hyper-Hobbseian empire, is growing old and must soon choose a successor. He favours the Archduke Tremane over many other possible (and in some cases more likely-looking) candidates, but is disinclined to give him an easy ride. He therefore entrusts him with a do-or-die mission to incorporate the kingdom of Hardorn into the empire which, as Hardorn lies on their borders, must be of interest to the Heralds of Valdemar. As it's of no less interest to the small kingdom of Karse, which has recently allied to Valdemar under pressure of incursions from Hardorn, there's a firm foundation for all sorts of military and diplomatic shenanigans into which youthful principals can get embroiled.

Fair dinkum, but a novel is written in words. This presents a problem for Lackey, whose love of words is all too avid; she likes to have as many around as possible. If there's room in a sentence for a weak emphatic adverb ending in -ly, she bungs one in. Lest unimportant words be discontent at their lowly lot, she tricks them out in italics throughout her dialogue and ratiocinative passages without regard for sound or sense (a habit I commented on reviewing *The Black Gryphon* in *Interzone* 97, which imparts a twee/camp gloss to the most innocent passage, and which is presumably intended to convince the reader that something important is going on). In the cause of full employment she engages words for undignified make-work in the narrative, viz:

Once again, they rose before sunrise, leaving the inn behind them still shrouded in darkness.

Apart from the naff use of "shrouded," would you expect them to leave the inn ahead of them? Or lit by a harsh, actinic glare?

Perhaps this incessant accumulation of verbiage is intended to save writer and reader alike the cruel effort of engaging the brain. All right, except that those who still read books do like them to be made by hand, sort of, you know, with words chosen one at a time because they are the right ones for the purpose, not chucked in by the barrow-load because someone has a vague idea that something from that barrow seemed to serve a more-or-less similar purpose in some other book a year or two back. A reader who pays for new goods has a right to something new, and a writer should tailor her words to her narrative, not expose it to the world in ill-fitting reach-me-downs. If it deserves no better, it deserves no life at all. A reviewer, I'm inclined to add, should not find his attention wandering from the story into speculation about how much the editor was paid and how he justified a red cent of it.

I staggered through over a hundred pages of this until I came to a passage dealing with the tenderer emotions. A young mage has just begun a gay relationship with another, older and more sophisticated mage. There's a party, and he notices the older man flirting with someone else (Oooh! Slut!). He stands it as long as he can, lurking on the fringes, and when no one pays him any attention, flounces out. Well, it's that or take part in the conversation, and being convinced that he's really nothing but a pretty face, he sticks to what he knows best. But he miss-times his exit; the only person who notices follows him and, having caught up with him, counsels him over six continuous pages, leaving him with a heightened perception of his own potential for murder but without, disappointingly, the urge to realize it there and then. Hackney Social Services would be proud, but give me Mary Renault.

Were Mercedes Lackey a nobody and Millennium a vanity imprint I'd not make this sort of fuss; but the blurb claims a million copies of her 15 books so far, and I don't suppose they've all been pulped yet. They're lurking in bookshops and libraries, representing the field of Sword and Sorcery, which is diminished thereby.

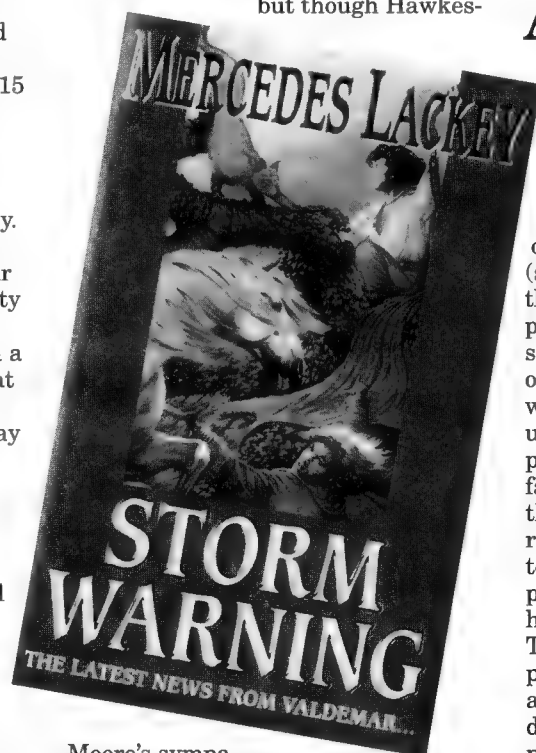
One of the great clichés of popular literature is the rural community where everybody knows everybody else. Thither comes a Stranger with a programme of his/her own, and what follows can range from *High Plains Drifter* to *The Sound of Music* by way of *Cold Comfort Farm*. In *Dancing in Circles* (Honno, £6.95) Julia Hawkes-Moore offers rather a neat variant: in the village of Glasmaen in the Black Mountains of south Wales the people may think they all know each other, but it rapidly proves that none of them knows more than the surface. They're a mixed bunch, with a generous helping of English left-over 1960s types overlying the descendants of many earlier immigrations from the east, but the book is mercifully free of comic Welshmen.

There are two mysterious strangers, from opposite poles of strangeness: Ainee Sealfin is a kelpie or selkie, capable of transforming herself into a seal, but also susceptible to the magic of human music; Dr Edward Keynes PhD appears, in his own eyes no less than those of everyone else, to be an archetypal stuffed shirt. But no one was born into that condition, and the revitalization of his spirit is the major theme of the book.

The action is confined to the week of a folk festival immediately succeeding the summer solstice, and begins with the capture of Ainee by Isaac Tallboys (a painter and violinist who

combines real talent with some notably gross manners and habits) and the arrival of Keynes, on a surveying expedition that may lead to a nuclear waste dump being built in a nearby valley. It ends with the decision of Ainee to go and Keynes to stay, each having learned something of love and attained a broader perspective in the time.

Inevitably this is a moral, and at times moralistic, tale. Keynes's survey arouses predictable local disquiet, but though Hawkes-



Moore's sympathies are very obviously with the nimbs she presents the arguments without the combination of smug ignorance and dishonesty to be expected on such occasions, and gives some consideration to those on the other side. She also weaves together very skilfully the unsettling emotional effects of the opportunities (real and imaginary) represented by the preternaturally desirable Ainee and the money the dump would generate. Both bring out the best and the worst in those involved, which implies a chance for best and worst to be examined, and a choice made between them. In general the right choices are made (though at no great sacrifice), but there's nothing saccharine about the ending.

BOOKS



REVIEWED

Within its narrow confines this is a stylish and accomplished novel. The emergence of Edward Keynes from his comfortable but barren existence is convincingly portrayed, without recourse to the lazy writer's devices of either a moment of satori or indigestible wedges of flashback while the character wrestles with his soul. Nor are the issues overblown; the sinister conspirators behind the dump are only common British bureaucrats, who play dirty but not rough – cross them, and your professional career may be blocked or your visa application turned down, but no assassins lurk in the bushes, and the early morning rap on the door will be nothing worse than a postman with an insufficiently stamped letter. Perhaps it's reading so much heroic fantasy that makes a conflict on a human scale so refreshing, but I liked this one, and recommend it.

And by way of contrast, how about a story set in an isolated rural community where everyone knows everyone else, but some mysterious strangers have taken up residence? Coomey, Texas, the setting for Patricia Anthony's *Happy Policeman* (NEL, £5.99) is isolated like nowhere else, having been cut off from the rest of the world in 1985 (six years ago). Beyond the barrier there may be anything or nothing; the people believe they may be the only survivors of an atomic war. On their own side are the Torku, alien beings who wish to study them "in their natural environment," in so far as that's possible. To this end they supply faithful replicas of all the goods which the town would normally have received – except for liquor and tobacco, which the Baptist pastor has persuaded them to curtail (how he has avoided lynching is a loose end). To stave off boredom many of the people carry on a parody of the economic activities from which they once derived their living, but with only the professionals and the police having any real work to do, marijuana is widely but haphazardly cultivated.

The analogy with a zoo is obvious; the Torku communicate with the people as well as they can, but there's no real meeting of minds. Their metaphysics are incomprehensible, and their physics are worse:

"Thermonuclear war is impossible," the alien said.

DeWitt pushed Granger out of the way. "Why?"

"Atmospheric pressure keeps the radioactivity in the compound. Once the warhead reaches space, the neutrons are lost into the vacuum. When the warhead returns to the atmosphere, there is no radioactivity to explode."

Bullshit, as a character remarks,



but the Torku believe in belief: if you take a favourable view of the universe, the universe will mould itself to accommodate it – tooth-fairy and all, should that be your pleasure. To them the principal human mystery is why we cling to beliefs which only make us miserable when we could adopt happier ones. Moreover, their beliefs work for themselves; if things aren't going well in this universe, they can call upon part of the pattern of another where things are better. The effect is a bit like Jerome Bixby's "It's a Good Life" crossed with Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*, but if it hasn't quite the bite of either the fault lies with the characters.

I think intentionally, Patricia Anthony has populated Coomey with stock folk from old soaps. There's the macho young cop who can't admit to himself that he's gay, the uptight fundamentalist pastor, the corrupt but incompetent mayor, and the viewpoint, police chief DeWitt Dawson, who loves his wife too much to admit to

himself that she's unfaithful – for all that he's carrying on an affair himself.

As the story opens DeWitt is called upon to investigate a murder, the first (surprisingly enough) in years, but he has no enthusiasm for the task, and consequently nor had I. Sf crime-writing is notoriously difficult, being subject to the *deus ex machina*, but when the investigator's only concern is that he shouldn't put the finger on any of his friends and family it behoves the writer to make them interesting enough to be worth protecting. As it is, despite the occasional patch of

good dialogue when the Torku are present, dull people vitiate an interesting situation more surely than interesting people will enliven a dull one. It's fair to say that Anthony lacks the precise virtues which inform *Dancing in Circles*, and vice versa – proving only that Hawkes-Moore's are more important.

It's also fair to say that once the murder is solved there's some good *grand guignol* humour, as the soap-opera characters try to stage their own courtroom drama, just like in *Perry Mason*, and then execute the killer, although no one knows how to organize such an event. As the Torku have taken away their guns it degenerates into a parody of a necktie party as foiled by Hopalong Cassidy. But even at that point the primary concern is the overarching soap preoccupation with who's cheatin' on whom, which does rather detract from the dignity of the occasion – or so I found; connoisseurs of small-town adultery will love it.

Chris Gilmore

H. P. Lovecraft's centennial generated a minor flurry of books. *Cthulhu 2000*, edited by Jim Turner (Arkham House, \$24.95), is the latest. Like every other work of "Lovecraftian horror" that's been perpetrated since the word became an adjective, it is a disappointment. I don't think I am being too hard on it by saying this. Disappointment is an inextricable part of Lovecraftian pastiche and Lovecraftian imitation, and this book is less of a disappointment than most.

I can unreservedly praise five or six stories here. Basil Copper's "Shaft Number 247" was a revelation: this modest but faultless account of a haunted humanity that has retreated below the Earth's surface comes as near to "getting it right" as anything I have ever read, and does so, hurrah, without a single explicit Mythos reference. Michael Shea's "Fat Face" can be read without shame; so can Gene Wolfe's "Lord of the Land" – but why this story rather than "The Other Dead Man"? T. E. D. Klein takes an oblique slant in the much-reprinted "Black Man with a Horn," one of the very few serious and successful attempts to work in the historical Lovecraft as a character. And finally there is Thomas Ligotti's superb "The Last Feast of Harlequin," a story which is obviously based on Lovecraft's "The Festival," but which does so much to transform that early and partial work that it can not fairly be called anything so derivative as a tribute.

Apart from that, though... We have three or four pieces by professional sf writers who are merely dropping the odd Mythos reference for fun; we have some horror stories, which to my mind don't go far enough beyond their genre;

The Gulfs Farther Out

Andy Robertson

and we have some fan fiction – good fan fiction, well-written fan fiction, but still fan fiction, stuff which should never have been considered for a book like this. And there are a few other stories which fall somewhere between these limits – like Kim Newman's "The Big Fish," which transcends its own campy-ness to pack a solid punch, or Poppy Z. Brite's Goth take on "The Hound." They are all very much more than readable (there isn't a single bad story in this collection), but real, cosmic, acrophobic horror, the touch of the Outside, is not in them.

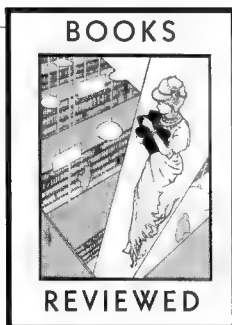
So it's back to the eternal question: what makes a good "Lovecraftian" story? And the other question: why are most of them so bad? As Lovecraft developed, he migrated steadily away from horror towards science fiction, and steadily away from the fantastic towards the real. His final stories were set at the limits of contemporary exploration and knowledge: the traditional supernatural element was supplanted, as a focus of cosmic terror, by the *extranatural* – "the utterly unplumbed gulfs still farther out ... where form and symmetry, light and heat, even matter and energy themselves, may be

unthinkably metamorphosed... I have merely got to the edge of this in CTHULHU" (letter from Lovecraft to the editor of *Weird Tales*). His social and scientific understanding was limited, and his writing talents were flawed, as he was the first to admit, but whether he did badly ("Dreams in the Witch House") or superbly well ("The Colour Out of Space") he never retreated from this vision. The problem with most Mythos pastiche is that it does not attempt to address *reality*, let alone summon up potent dream-symbols of what may lie beyond its borders. Instead, it addresses the work of a certain writer; and in doing so, it relegates itself to a secondary or tertiary world, and to futility.

Successful contemporary stories in the Lovecraftian tradition are therefore few. Some (like A. A. Attanasio's "The Star Pools," which ought to have been here) employ a gritty low-life realism and then filter in glimpses of the Outside through stupid or depraved protagonists. These are on the level of "The Horror at Red Hook," if you like, and they are done better than Lovecraft could ever have done that sort of thing himself, or wanted to. There are some modern writers whose work kindles moods akin to those found in Lovecraft's early, nightmare-inspired fantasies, though to argue about whether these works are "Mythos fiction" is irrelevant. But we have no one who can do the same thing for Lovecraft's greatest works, for the stories like "At the Mountains of Madness" or "The Shadow Out of Time," where the hints and cloudy images have taken on solidity and *detail* without losing a fraction of their authentic terror.

Our knowledge has expanded enormously since Lovecraft's time, and the darkness outside has expanded, in its necessary proportion. If the discovery of Pluto, the unexplored fractions of the Antarctic, and a half-understanding of cheap popularizations of evolution, relativity and quantum physics, could so inspire Lovecraft in the 1920s, what should we be able to do with what we have today? With a cosmology that treats the whole universe as a quantum fluctuation in nothing, a psychology that parses our deepest desires and our most cherished values to the mechanistic squabbling of genes, a biology that is steadily shattering our illusions about human free will and equality, and a world full of resurgent diseases and resurgent

superstition? We know so much more, and we should see that much more clearly, that Lovecraft's vision of cosmic indifferentism was right. But where is the writer who will properly handle these themes? I do not know; but I will suggest that part of the trouble is that we continue to regard



Lovecraft as a writer of horror stories, whereas his best work is clearly science fiction.

Meanwhile, this book collects most of the best Mythos-inspired fiction of the last generation. Read that as a recommendation and a lament.

(I would also like to mention Lovecraft's *Miscellaneous Writings*, edited by S. T. Joshi [Arkham House, \$29.95]. This surely definitive collection of HPL's minor non-fiction is strictly for the dedicated Lovecraft fan [or scholar], and there really is little to say about it in *Interzone*; but I will take the opportunity to thank Joshi for it, and for his continuing labours. So when do we get the new *Selected Letters*?)

Andy Robertson

Thirty years of future history has been on show at the Science Museum, London, since October in an exhibition that covers stellar exploration from the early pioneering days (and several vessels called the *Enterprise*) up to the recent times (and an altogether sleeker starship – *Voyager*, lost in the uncharted Delta Quadrant). Yes, it's *Star Trek: The Exhibition*.

After you've parted with your money (adults £4.95, children 5-17/UB 40/pensioners £2.95 – but free admission for children under five and the registered disabled) you'll be greeted by an eight-foot model of the *Enterprise-A*, commissioned especially for the event by Paramount Pictures, and, surrounding it, an array of Classic Trek stills. Next along is a mock-up of the original *Enterprise* bridge, complete with Captain Kirk's chair (and no, you can't sit down – a small cardboard sign reads: KIRK ONLY). A sound loop (of voices, Chekov, Uhura etc and various sound effects) adds to the atmosphere – a ridiculously short loop, given the number of original episodes. The bridge, though, is the likely highlight of many a Trekkers' visit – although there's some stiff competition from the *Next Generation* transporter platform.

Going round, you'll find a lot of... seats: Picard's command chair from *TNG*, Q's judge's seat, the Klingon throne, and, from the latest film, *Generations*, the Klingon sisters' bridge seat (all black leather and rough metal, a Hell's Angel version of starship furniture – given our choice of any single item to take away, this would win hands down). Seeing these empty seats gets you thinking about the symbolism of thrones and other seats of authority – because, off screen, minus the actor-captains, they seem possessed of an extraordinary aura of power.

There are other props, too – phasers, a communicator, tricorder and report pad – from the original show which, despite being obviously 1960s-style

technology, didn't seem that dated. There are busts of some of the better-known aliens, and lots and lots of costumes in perspex cabinets (including a female Klingon's outfit from "The Day of the Dove" wrongly labelled as belonging to a female Romulan – yes, they deliberately didn't get everything exactly right just so we accuracy fanatics would have something to keep us occupied). The costumes are easily the spookiest things in the exhibition, though, because they look so... lived in, as if they are the relics of some Victorian space-faring era we've unaccountably wiped from our memories.

Still, cluttered, and all rather thrown together, it's a flawed exhibit. The placing of individual items doesn't always work – for instance, there's a VR helmet, supposedly to provide linking to the holodeck – but not one single picture of the holodeck could be found. Still the exhibition does manage to make the most of some links between modern-day technology and Trek: cellphone/communicator; hypospray/hypospray; apple pad/report pad. There are video

screens throughout giving histories of the original series, the seven movies, *TNG*, *DS9* and *Voyager*, with interviews with various cast members – but the volume is often too low to be heard clearly: why no telephone & start button as used with other exhibits in the Science Museum? There's also a lack of hands-on facilities for young children, and the absence of several models seen in the preceding Glasgow exhibition is particularly disappointing.

The attendants do add something extra, though, dressed in a variety of costumes – Starfleet, both generations of Klingon, even bartender Guinan (sadly unaccompanied by her Ten Forward bar). And there's one undeniable plus with this particular site: if the fictional space history gets you curious about the real thing, you've only got to slip downstairs and check out the space section – Apollo capsules, a

mock-up of the first lunar landing, and not a crinkly-browed Klingon on view anywhere.

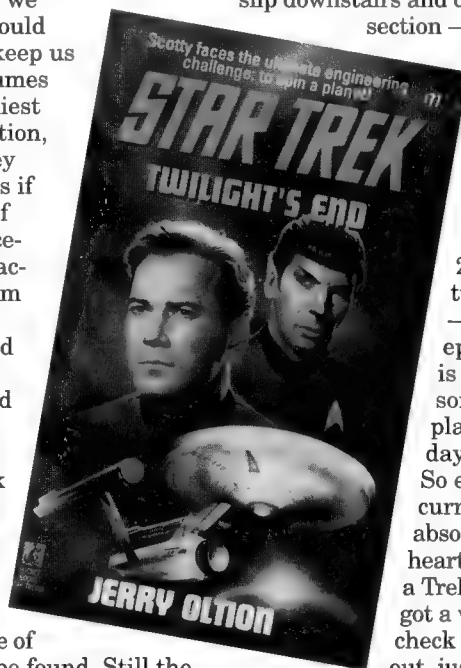
Love it or loathe it, Trek is a 20th-century cultural phenomenon – apparently an episode of *Star Trek* is being shown somewhere on the planet 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. So even if you're not currently (and have absolutely cross-your-heart never ever been) a Trekkie, you've still got a valid reason to check this exhibition out, just to see what all the fuss has been about.

Better hurry though – it beams out of the Science Museum on February 25th.

Neil Jones & Howard Watts

Boldly Queuing

Neil Jones and
Howard Watts



The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Alexander, David. **Star Trek Creator: The Authorized Biography of Gene Roddenberry**. Foreword by Ray Bradbury. Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-0792-X, xxii+599pp, C-format paperback, £12.99 [or £8.99]. (Biography of the sf television-series producer; first published in the USA, 1994; there is some confusion about the price: the book itself states £12.99, while the accompanying publicity matter says £8.99; if the former price is correct, then this paperback is only £3 cheaper than the same publisher's hardcover edition, released at the end of 1994.) 16th November 1995.

Aycliffe, Jonathan. **The Matrix**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-649319-X, 238pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1994; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 90; "Jonathan Aycliffe" is a pseudonym of Denis MacEoin, also known as "Daniel Easterman.") 27th November 1995.

Baird, Wilhelmina. **Crash-course**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-45-118557-9, 277pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; "Wilhelmina Baird" is a pseudonym Joyce Carstairs Hutchinson, who published a few short stories under the name "Kathleen James" in the 1960s; although it's cyberpunkish and trendy, here we have another debut sf novel by a mature British lady ["born in 1935 in Dunfermline, Fife"] who, like Pauline Ashwell, is suddenly making a name for herself; why, oh, why, though, do Penguin take so long to release their UK editions of American-initiated books such as this?) 7th December 1995.

Bell, Julie. **Hard Curves: The Fantasy Art of Julie Bell**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Foreword by Hank Rose. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-223-4, 127pp, very large-format paperback, £12.95. (Fantasy art collection, first edition; Bell is the bodybuilder-turned-artist's model-turned artist who is married to Boris

Vallejo and is now fast making a name for herself with work in comics, posters, trading cards, etc.) 23rd November 1995.

Brown, Eric. **Blue Shifting**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-33590-1, 264pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Youll, £4.99. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains eight stories, three of which, "Piloting," "Elegy Perpetuum" and "Epsilon Dreams," first appeared in *Interzone*; two substantial tales, "Song of Summer" and "Blue Shifting," are original to the book.) 1st December 1995.

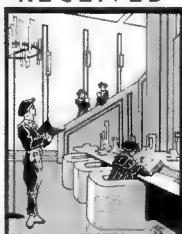
Cherryh, C. J. **Fortress in the Eye of Time**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648220-1, 773pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Goodfellow, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; HarperCollins, who have not published Cherryh before, are presenting it as her "high fantasy triumph"; the blurb does make it sound seductive.) 4th December 1995.

Cherryh, C. J. **Rider at the Gate**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-63828-1, 423pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 103.) January 1996.

Cherryh, C. J. **Tripoint**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-63830-3, 377pp, A-format paperback, cover by Rolf Moyr, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 103.) 15th December 1995.

Clark, Simon. **Blood Crazy**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-62575-9, 343pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in

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1995.) 15th December 1995.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Mike McQuay. **Richter 10**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06116-2, 336pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 29th February 1996.

Clarke, Arthur C., and Mike McQuay. **Richter 10**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09708-3, 370pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1996; proof copy received.) March 1996.

Cole, Allan, and Chris Bunch. **The Kingdoms of the Night**. "Book Three of The Far Kingdoms." Legend, ISBN 0-09-946451-9, 450pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gnemo, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 99.) 7th December 1995.

Constantine, Storm. **Stalking Tender Prey**. Signet/Creed, ISBN 0-45-118401-7, xxiv+648pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; like her colleague Freda Warrington [see below], Storm Constantine seems to be making the transition to Anne Rice-lookalike fiction; this is the first in a trilogy.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Cox, Andy, ed. **Last Rites & Resurrections: Stories from The Third Alternative Volume One**. TTA Press [5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2LB], ISBN 0-9526947-0-0, 170pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Checkley, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains 16 stories drawn from the editor's small-press magazine; contributors include Rick Cadger, Mat Coward, Lawrence Dyer, Chris Kenworthy, Joel Lane, Mike O'Driscoll, Nicholas Royle, Julie Travis and Conrad Williams.) 25th November 1995.

Cusick, Richie Tankersley. **Fatal Secrets**. Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-13274-1, 216pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Young-adult horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) November 1995.

Dick, Philip K. **Blade Runner (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?)**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-35047-2, 216pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, 1968; 26th Bal-

lantine/Del Rey printing since 1982; the text appears to be unchanged from the first edition, except that somewhere along the line the date "1992," the original year of the novel's setting, has been changed to "2021" [presumably the year of the film's setting].) 1st November 1995.

Egan, Greg. **Distress**. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-286-X, 343pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; Egan's third sf novel, of which the publishers say: "quantum physics and the Theory of Everything lie at the heart of this unputdownable thriller.") 18th December 1995.

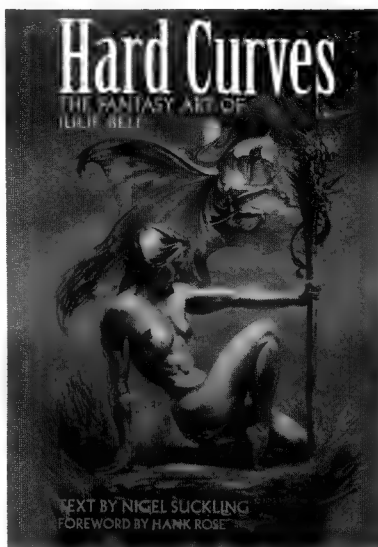
Eggleton, Bob. **Alien Horizons: The Fantastic Art of Bob Eggleton**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Introduction by Gregory Benford. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-336-2, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £12.95. (Sf/fantasy art collection, first edition; a previously unpublished painting from this book adorned the cover of *Interzone* 101.) 16th November 1995.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Life Form**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-358-1, 311pp, A-format paperback, cover by Linda Messier, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) 7th December 1995.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Mid-Flinx**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38374-5, 331pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$22. (Sf novel, first edition; latest in the "Flinx of the Commonwealth" series of adventures which began with Foster's first published novel, *The Tar-Aiym Krang*, in 1972.) 1st November 1995.

Fowler, Christopher. **Psychoville**. "A Suburban Nightmare." Warner, ISBN 0-7515-1432-2, 417pp, B-format paperback, cover(s) by Jay Eff, £7.99. (Horror novel, first edition; like the paperback of Fowler's last novel, *Spanky*, this book is strikingly designed, with a detachable dust-jacket.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Gemmell, David A. **The Complete Chronicles of the Jerusalem Man: Wolf in Shadow, The Last Guardian, Bloodstone**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-966341-4, xv+912pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Harrison, £15.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; the three novels were first published in 1987, 1989 and 1994 [although the publishers don't tell us this]; each has a new two-page foreword by the author, whose middle "A" seems to have crept back after having



been banished from his recent title pages.) 7th December 1995.

Gemmell, David A. **The Complete Chronicles of the Jerusalem Man: Wolf in Shadow, The Last Guardian, Bloodstone.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-967661-3, xv+912pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £9.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in 1995; this is near-identical to the above hardcover, but follows just over a month later.) 18th January 1996.

Gemmell, David A. **The Legend of Deathwalker.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-037057, 334pp, hardcover, cover by Mike Posen, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; with this book, latest in the "Druss" series, Gemmell changes his British publisher.) 1st February 1996.

Gemmell, David. **Waylander.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37907-1, 310pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1986.) 1st November 1995.

Goonan, Kathleen Ann. **The Bones of Time.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85916-3, 382pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second book by the author of the highly-praised *Queen City Jazz*.) February 1996.

Gould, Steven. **Wildside.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85473-0, 316pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second book by the author of *Jumper*, it sounds rather reminiscent of Clifford D. Simak and possibly is intended for the "young adult" market.) March 1996.

Gray, Muriel. **The Trickster.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-647718-6, 707pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1994; a debut novel by a new British [Glaswegian] writer, already well-known in the UK as a TV presenter.) 4th December 1995.

Green, Simon R. **Hellworld.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05387-2, 256pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; sequel to *Mistworld* and *Ghostworld*; for some reason this British edition has been delayed considerably, and Gollancz seem to be making the claim that it's a 1995 title.) 7th December 1995.

Griffith, Nicola. **Slow River.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648033-0, 343pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 100.) 4th December 1995.

Halam, Ann. **The Fear Man.** Orion, ISBN 1-85881-158-9, 135pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition; "Ann Halam" is a pseudonym of Gwyneth Jones.) 27th November 1995.

Hambly, Barbara. **Traveling with the Dead.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38102-5, 343pp, hardcover, cover by Victor Sadowski, \$22. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in this issue of *Interzone*.) Late entry: 1st October publication, received in November 1995.

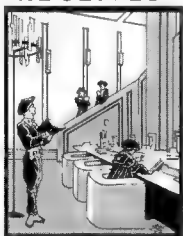
Hardy, Phil, ed. **The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction.** Illustrations by the Kobal Collection. 3rd edition. Aurum Press, ISBN 1-85410-382-2, 512pp, very large-format paperback, £25. (Chronological encyclopedia of sf movies; earlier editions appeared in 1984 and 1991; most of the new entries for films of the last few years have been written by Kim Newman; as before, this is an impressive and beautifully illustrated volume, covering over 1,550 movies in detail – the one essential book for all those seriously interested in sf film.) 17th November 1995.

Hickman, Tracy. **Requiem of Stars: Songs of the Stellar Wind, Book 1.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-57302-0, 376pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Hickman's first solo novel, it appears to be fantastic space opera – much like Margaret Weis's solo novels, and, for that matter, much like *Star Wars*.) 8th February 1996.

Hughes, Rhys. **Worming the Harpy, and Other Bitter Pills.** Tartarus Press [5 Birch Terr., Hangingbirch Lane, Horam, E. Sussex], ISBN 1-872621-20-X, 203pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror collection, first edition; it is quite handsomely produced, with a black-and-gold cover, and is available post-free at the stated price direct from the publisher.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Janes, Phil. **I, Arnold: Round Three of the Galaxy Game.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-404-8, 280pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £4.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1995.) 4th December 1995.

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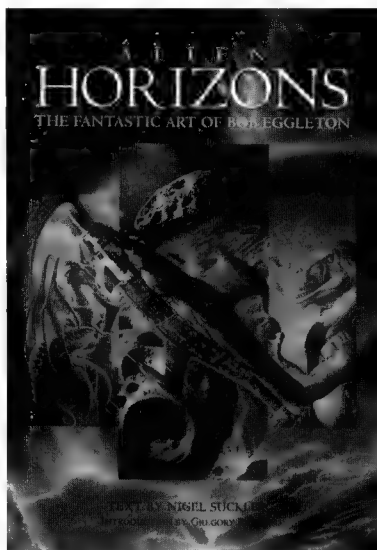
Jones, Gwyneth. **Seven Tales and a Fable.** Edgewood Press [PO Box 380264, Cambridge, MA 02238, USA], ISBN 0-9629066-5-4, vi+132pp, small-press paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, \$8. (Fantasy collection, first edition; one story dates

from 1975, but most of the others are from original anthologies of the 1980s; three of the tales are original to the book; the back cover has commendations from Patricia McKillip, Robin McKinley, Rachel Pollack and Delia Sherman; with its six-page introduction by the author, and a cover in Canty's usual delicate style, it's a handsome production.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Jones, Jenny. **Firefly Dreams.** Point Fantasy, ISBN 0-590-13375-6, 259pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Scutt, £3.99. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first edition; Jones's second juvenile novel: she has also written four fantasies for adults.) November 1995.

Laidlaw, Marc. **The 37th Mandala.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-13021-X, 352pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) February 1996.

Lessing, Doris. **Playing the Game.** Illustrated by Charlie Adlard. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21689-8, unpaginated [about 64pp], large-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy graphic novel, first edition; it's billed as "a unique literary event: the first ever graphic novel to be written by a major contemporary novelist.") 4th December 1995.



McCaffrey, Anne. **The Crystal Singer Trilogy: Crystal Singer, Killashandra, Crystal Line.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40292-8, 660pp, trade paperback, \$16. (Sf omnibus, first edition; proof copy received; the three novels were first published in 1982, 1985 and 1992.) January 1996.

McCaffrey, Anne. **The Dolphins of Pern.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-36895-9, 371pp, A-format paperback, cover by Rowena, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; umpteenth in the "Dragonriders of Pern" series.) 1st November 1995.

McQuinn, Donald E. **Witch.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39737-1, 625pp, A-format paperback, cover by Michael Herring, \$6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994; third in the trilogy begun by *Warrior and Wanderer*.) Late entry: 1st October publication, received in November 1995.

Masterton, Graham. **Spirit.** Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-1668-3, 424pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1995.) 30th November 1995.

Middleton, Martin. **Circle of Light: Book One of the Chronicles of the Custodians.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33105-1, 379pp, A-format paperback, cover by George Underwood, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1990; the author is a British-born Australian, born 1954.) 1st December 1995.

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The Parafith War.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85904-X, 383pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) February 1996.

Moore, Christopher. **Blood-sucking Fiends: A Love Story.** Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99596-7, 317pp, B-format paperback, cover by Kenneth Hauff, £6.99. (Humorous horror/fantasy novel; first published in the USA, 1995; a third novel by the author of *Practical Demonkeeping* and *Coyote Blue*.) 7th December 1995.

Patton, Kevin. **Kayos (and Old Knight).** Book Guild [Temple House, 25 High St., Lewes, E. Sussex BN7 2LU], ISBN 1-85776-038-7, 242pp, hardcover, £15. (Humorous Sf novel, first edition; apparently a debut book by a new British writer.) Late entry: 26th October publication, received in November 1995.

Powers, Tim. **Expiration Date.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86086-2, 381pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1995; proof copy received.) January 1996.

Rickman, Phil. **December.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-33677-0, 658pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1994.) *1st December 1995.*

Roberts, Keith. **Pavane.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-06103-0, vii+279pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ian Miller, £5.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in 1968; originally this was a Faber hardcover, then a Panther paperback, then a Gollancz hardcover, then a Penguin paperback, and now it's a VGSF paperback: good to see it back in print again.) *7th December 1995.*

Rosendorfer, Herbert. **Stephanie: or, A Previous Existence.** Translated by Mike Mitchell. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-17-8, 153pp, B-format paperback, cover by Lise Weisgerber, £7.99. (Dark fantasy novel, first published in Germany, 1987; by the author, born 1934, best known for his *The Architect of Ruins* [1969], this book is described as "an extraordinary work of art which has enjoyed critical and commercial success throughout Europe, and will shortly be made into a film.") *11th January 1996.*

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **Sins of the Blood.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-243-6, 357pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £5.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 100.) *4th December 1995.*

Russell, R. B., and Rosalie Parker, eds. **Tales from Tartarus.** Tartarus Press [5 Birch Terr., Hangingbirch Lane, Horam, E. Sussex], ISBN 1-872621-19-7, iii+202pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror/weird anthology, first edition; contributors include Ramsey Campbell, Simon Clark, Andy Darlington and Rhys Hughes, along with several others unknown to us; in the past, Tartarus Press has specialized in publishing books by Arthur Machen, and these tales seem to be exercises in that master's vein; available post-free at the stated price direct from the publisher.) *No date shown: received in November 1995.*

Shatner, William. **Tek Power.** Pocket, ISBN 0-671-85457-7, 220pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994; sixth in the series, it was almost certainly ghostwritten by Ron Goulart.) *No date shown: received in November 1995.*

Simmons, Dan. **Endymion.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0525-6, 441pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA,

1996; proof copy received; sequel to *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*.) *15th February 1996.*

Sinclair, Alison. **Legacies.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-401-3, 419pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Gudyas, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1995; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 97.) *4th December 1995.*

Stasheff, Christopher. **The Secular Wizard: Book Four of A Wizard in Rhyme.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38854-2, 367pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *Late entry: 1st October publication, received in November 1995.*

Tepper, Sheri S. **Shadow's End.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-647342-3, 388pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1994.) *27th November 1995.*

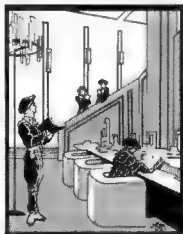
Tolkien, J. R. R. **The War of the Jewels: The Later Silmarillion, Part Two: The Legends of Beleriand.** "The History of Middle-earth, Volume 11." Edited by Christopher Tolkien. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10324-5, xiv+470pp, B-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £9.99. (Heavily annotated posthumous writings by the 20th-century master of high fantasy; first published in 1994; this is the first of this series that we have seen in quite some time: the books have gone on appearing, very quietly, since HarperCollins took over Unwin, and presumably Tolkien enthusiasts have been buying them; the previous two volumes, which we were not sent for review, either in hardcover or in paperback, were entitled *Sauron Defeated* and *Morgoth's Ring*; a 12th, and perhaps final, volume is promised for 1996.) *27th November 1995.*

Warrington, Freda. **Dark Cathedral.** Signet/Creed, ISBN 0-45-118402-5, xviii+519pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *28th March 1996.*

Welch, Jane. **The Runes of War: Book One of The Runespell Trilogy.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648025-X, 495pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer, born 1964.) *4th December 1995.*

Wells, H. G. **The Time Machine.** "Centennial Edition."

BOOKS RECEIVED



NOVEMBER 1995

Edited by John Lawton. Everyman, ISBN 0-460-87735-6, liv+106pp, B-format paperback, cover by Léon Augustin, £3.99. (Sf novella, first published in 1895; since we remarked [see the listing for *The Invisible Man*, last issue] that we hadn't seen any of these Dent/Every-

man editions of Wells before now, the publishers have kindly sent us this re-release of Wells's first book, issued to mark its centenary some months ago; with its new introduction and apparatus, this volume replaces the less satisfactory 1993 one which carried an introduction by Michael Moorcock; we have also been sent two earlier books in the series, *When the Sleeper Wakes* [1899], edited by John Lawton, and *A Modern Utopia* [1905], edited by Krishan Kumar, fatter volumes priced at £5.99 each; since both were

1994 releases, we have chosen not to give them separate listings here, but as the first-ever annotated editions of these lesser-known texts they are to be recommended: all serious sf readers should buy them for their Wells collections.) *Late entry: summer [?] publication, received in November 1995.*

Wilson, Robin Scott, ed. **Paragons: Twelve Master Science Fiction Writers Ply Their Craft.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-14023-1, xiii+368pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; an annotated "how-to" anthology, representing a come-back volume for Wilson, who edited various sf anthologies in the 1970s; it contains reprint stories by Greg Bear, Pat Cadigan, Nancy Kress, Pat Murphy, Kim Stanley Robinson, Lucius Shepard, Bruce Sterling, Howard Waldrop and others; Sterling's article "A Workshop Lexicon" is reprinted from *Interzone* as an appendix.) *April 1996.*

SPINOFFERY

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

Ab Hugh, Dafydd, and Brad Linaweaver. **Hell on Earth.** "Doom." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-52562-X, 248pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf computer-game spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; second in the series; it's copyright "Id Software, Inc."; this is the American first edition of August 1995 with a British price sticker.) *No date shown: received in November 1995.*

Ab Hugh, Dafydd, and Brad Linaweaver. **Knee-Deep in the Dead.** "Doom." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-52555-7, 250pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf computer-game spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; first in the series; it's copyright "Id Software, Inc."; this is the American first edition of August 1995 with a British price sticker.) *No date shown: received in November 1995.*

Adams, Douglas. **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.** Ballantine, ISBN 0-345-39180-2, 216pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Humorous sf radio-series novelization, first published in the UK, 1980; is this the first US mass-market paper-

back edition? – surely not.) *1st November 1995.*

Altman, Mark A., and Edward Gross. **The Deep Space Log Book: A Second Season Companion.** "The Essential Unofficial Guide." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0848-9, 119pp, very large-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf television-series programme guide, first published in the USA, 1995; it relates to *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* but also seems to contain material on *Star Trek: Voyager*.) *Late entry: 26th October publication, received in November 1995.*

Anderson, Kevin J. **Ground Zero.** "The X-Files." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225448-4, 290pp, hardcover, £9.99. (Sf/horror television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; based on the characters created by TV writer-producer Chris Carter.) *4th December 1995.*

Betancourt, John Gregory. **Incident at Arbuk.** "Star Trek: Voyager, #5." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-50248-2, 214pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the author's name is mis-spelled on the

cover; this is the American first edition of November 1995 with a British price sticker.) 28th November 1995.

Bischoff, David. **Demon Wing.** "Gerry Anderson's *Space Precinct*." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648231-7, 224pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) 4th December 1995.

Carey, Diane. **Station Rage.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, #13." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-88561-8, 277pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this is the American first edition of November 1995 with a British price added.) 28th November 1995.

David, Peter. **The Captain's Daughter.** "Star Trek, #76." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-52047-4, 278pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this is the American first edition of December 1995 with a British price added.) 4th December 1995.

Dicks, Terrance. **Shakedown.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20459-X, 233pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Elson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; in part, it's a novelization of Dicks's own script for a straight-to-video 50-minute film, *Shakedown: The Return of the Sontarans*, and eight pages of black-and-white photographs from that production are included in this book.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Emery, Clayton. **Whispering Woods.** "Magic: The Gathering." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0719-9, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Murphy, £4.99. (Spinoff fantasy novel, based on a trading-card game; first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "Wizards of the Coast, Inc."; founded as recently as 1993, this Seattle-based company has already sold some 500 million fantasy trading cards [so states the accompanying publicity]; "trading cards" are what used to be known in this country, eons ago, as "cigarette cards," and they have become all the rage in America recently; I once saw a German friend's huge collection of Hitler-era cigarette cards, and they were fantasy too — of a disquieting sort [there ain't nothing new under the sun].) Late entry: 14th September publication, received in November 1995.

Forstchen, William R. **Arena.** "Magic: The Gathering." Boxtree,

ISBN 0-7522-0724-5, 297pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Murphy, £4.99. (Spinoff fantasy novel, based on a trading-card game; first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "Wizards of the Coast, Inc.") Late entry: 14th September publication, received in November 1995.

Genge, N. E. **The Unofficial X-Files Companion: An X-File's Guide to the Mysteries, Conspiracies, and Really Strange Truths Behind the Series.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-65441-2, xii+227pp, large-format paperback, £9.99. (Survey of fringe science and pseudoscience, tied in to the sf/horror television show created by Chris Carter; first published in the USA, 1995; the author is Canadian.) 11th December 1995.

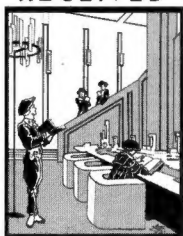
Gross, Edward, and Mark A. Altman. **Creating the Next Generation.** "The Conception and Creation of a Phenomenon." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0843-8, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £9.99. (Account of the making of the sf television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; first published in the USA, 1995; it contains eight pages of relevant colour photographs, even if [this being an "unofficial" book] the publishers are keen to assure us that none of them are copyright Paramount Pictures.) 2nd November 1995.

Howe, David J., and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who: The Handbook. The Fifth Doctor.** Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20458-1, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Companion to the *Doctor Who* television series which starred Peter Davison [1982-1984]; first edition.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Johnson, Kij, and Greg Cox. **Dragon's Honor.** "Star Trek: The Next Generation, #38." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-50107-0, 277pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this is the American first edition of January 1996 with a British price added.) 8th January 1996.

Lowry, Brian. **The Truth is Out There: The Official Guide to The X-Files.** Harper-Collins, ISBN 0-00-255702-9, 277pp, large-format paperback, £9.99. (Illustrated companion to the sf/horror television series created by Chris Carter; first published in the USA, 1995.) 4th December 1995.

BOOKS RECEIVED



NOVEMBER 1995

Lucas, George. **Star Wars: A New Hope.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40077-1, vi+260pp, hardcover, \$16. (Sf movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1976; this is a hardcover reissue, with a "new" subtitle [taken from the original movie], of what

is probably the bestselling novelization of all time; it contains a new three-paragraph introduction by Lucas which acknowledges that the book was ghostwritten by the prolific Alan Dean Foster; confusingly, the publishers have included a list of books by another author, Brian Daley, opposite the title page.) Late entry: 1st September publication, received in November 1995.

McCaffrey, Anne, and Jody Lynn Nye. **The Ship Who Won.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-360-3, 330pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £5.99. (Sf sharecrop novel, first published in the USA, 1994; it's copyright "Bill Fawcett and Associates," and is likely to have been written by Nye, not McCaffrey.) 7th December 1995.

McIntee, David A. **Lords of the Storm.** "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20460-3, 281pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Miller, Rand and Robyn, with David Wingrove. **Myst: The Book of Atrus.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03959-9, 287pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, based on a CD-ROM game, first published in the USA, 1995; Rand and Robyn Miller are the game's creators, and Wingrove presumably has written the book; it's a strange-looking thing, sans dustjacket and printed on artificially "browned" paper in order to resemble some old grimoire — or whatever.) 7th December 1995.

Oltion, Jerry. **Twilight's End.** "Star Trek, #77." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-53873-X, 272pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American first edition of January 1996 with a British price added.) 8th January 1996.

Raben, Richard, and Hiyaquha Cohen. **Boldly Live as You've Never Lived Before: (Unauthorized and Unexpected)**

Life Lessons from Star Trek. Morrow, ISBN 0-688-14371-7, xiv+241pp, hardcover, \$14.95. ("Self-actualization" text, a work of Jungian uplift, drawing its examples from the sf television series created by the late Gene Roddenberry [who, at this rate, may yet be exalted into one of history's unluckiest "saints," far out-stripping the late L. Ron Hubbard]; first edition.) 15th November 1995.

Reeves-Stevens, Judith and Garfield. **The Art of Star Trek.** Pocket, ISBN 0-671-89804-3, xxi+295pp, hardcover, cover by John Knoll and Mikido Uesugi, £35. (Sf TV-series art portfolio, with descriptive text; first published in the USA, 1995; this is the American first edition with a British price added; it's a large-format hardcover with many colour plates, so it seems absurd for it to be labelled with the grand old name of "Pocket Books" [originally America's first mass-market paperback company, founded in 1939]: why didn't they release it as a Simon & Schuster title?) 28th November 1995.

Robinson, Nigel. **The Living Stones.** "The Tomorrow People." Boxtree/Sapling, ISBN 0-7522-0652-4, 140pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf television-series novelization, first edition; based on a TV script by Lee Pressman.) 16th November 1995.

Robinson, Nigel. **The Rameses Connection.** "The Tomorrow People." Boxtree/Sapling, ISBN 0-7522-0647-8, 180pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf television-series novelization, first edition; based on a TV script by Grant Cathro.) 16th November 1995.

Sheckley, Robert. **The Laertian Gamble.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, #12." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-88690-8, 273pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; unlike most "Trek" novelizers, Sheckley is a veteran sf writer who produced distinguished work in the 1950s and 60s; this is the American first edition of September 1995 with a British price sticker.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

Wright, Susan. **Violations.** "Star Trek: Voyager, #4." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-52046-6, 279pp, A-format paperback, £4.50. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1995; this is the American first edition of September 1995 with a British price sticker.) No date shown: received in November 1995.

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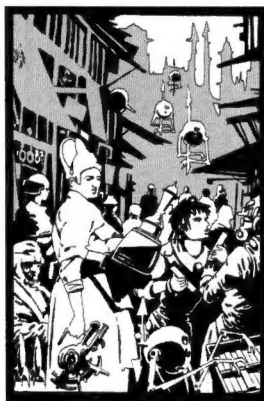
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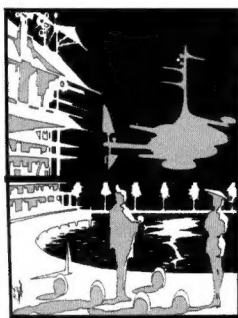
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BRUCE
BETHKE

HEADCRA\$H is approaching ...

Don't get caught with your systems down

C:\BETHKE> RUN DOS, RUN! [ENTER]

Bad command or file name

C:\BETHKE> Jack Burroughs is a man more accustomed to saving documents than saving his skin. The Information Superhighway may be a busy place, but, as any Junior Assistant Software Engineer for Monolithic Diversified Enterprises (Building 305) will tell you, it's not easy getting out of the bicycle lane. For Jack Burroughs, however, things are about to change. [ENTER]

Bad command or file name

C:\BETHKE> Before you can say 'relational database', Jack finds himself caught in a tangled cyberweb of corporate double-dealing and virtual espionage. And when he's forced to put his life on-line, it soon becomes apparent that his grip on (virtual) reality is by no means secure. [ENTER]



ORBIT

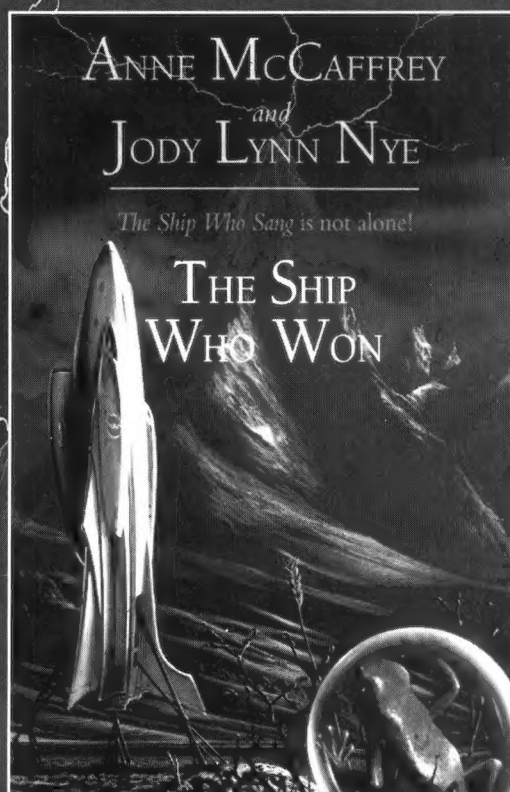
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ANNE MCCAFFREY
AND JODY LYNN NYE



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Carialle was born so physically disadvantaged that her only chance for life was as a shell person. So, like others before her, she decided to 'become' a spaceship, with a guy called Keff as her brawn. Their mission is to search the galaxy for signs of intelligent life, but on the quiet planet of Ozran they find more than they bargained for ...



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